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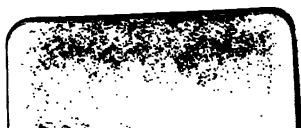
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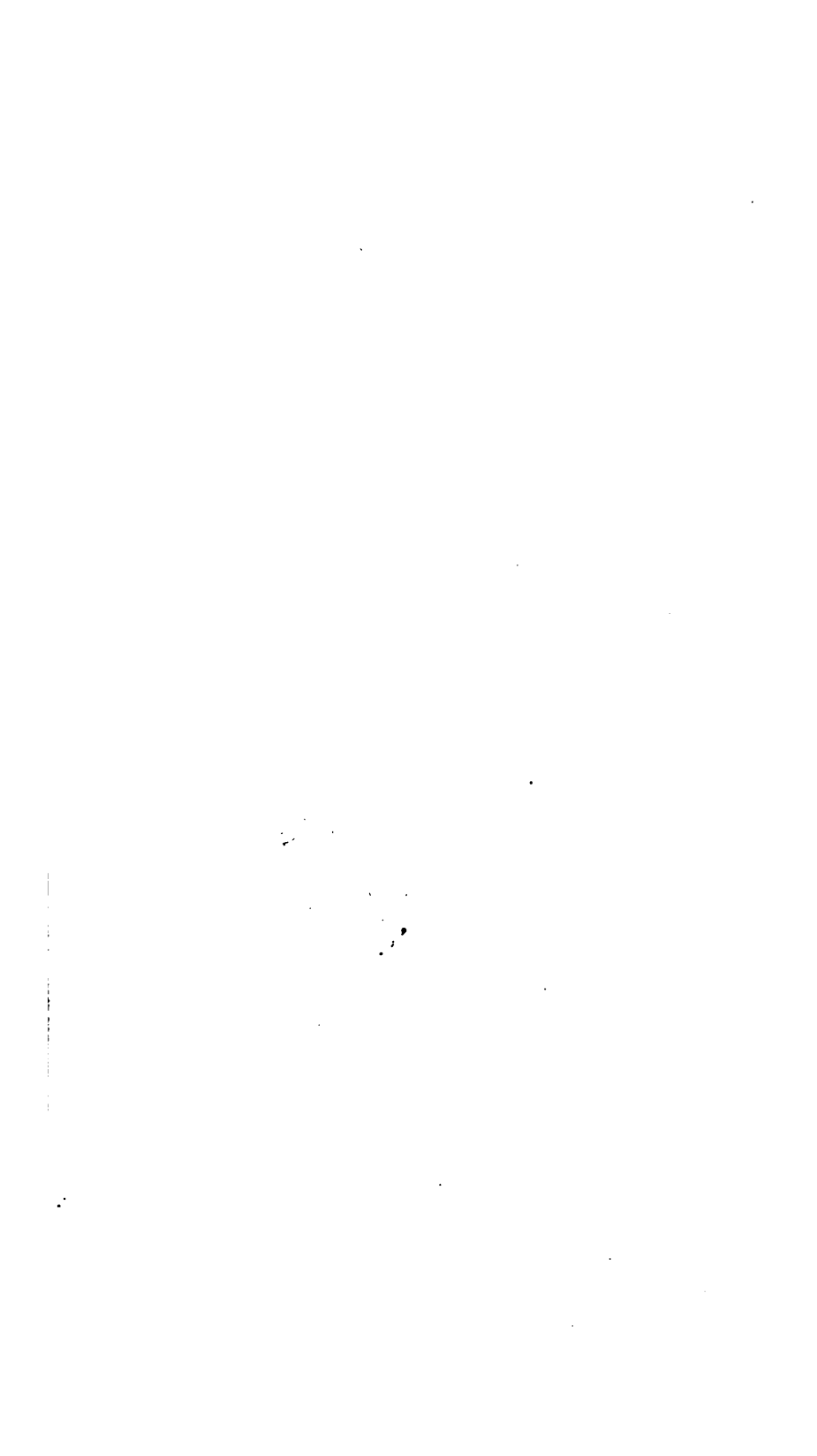




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BEPPPO THE CONSCRIPT.

A Nobel.

BY

T. ADOLPHUS TROLLOPE,

AUTHOR OF "LA BEATA," ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. II.



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BEPPPO, THE CONSCRIPT.

BOOK III.

PUTTING ON THE SCREW.

CHAPTER I.

THE TWO BROTHERS.

IT was early in the afternoon when Beppo left Fano, but it was far into the night before he reached Bella Luce, and he never could give any account of the intervening hours. The tidings of his bad number were known in the village before he came there, for though he had been the first of all those who returned from Fano to Santa Lucia that evening to leave the city, and most of the others had to perform the journey on foot, they all reached home before him. Yet

none of them had seen anything of Beppo Vanni by the road. He must have wandered out of it somehow. But he could give no account of himself.

Though it was past midnight, he found his mother sitting up for him. Her first idea on looking into his face as he entered the house was, that he had been drinking to drown the sense of the misfortune that had fallen upon him. The Romagnole peasantry, though not great offenders in that way, are not so wholly free from the vice of drunkenness as the Tuscan populations are. But Beppo Vanni had never been known to have been guilty of excess in that kind. So much the more heavy, thought his mother, must the blow have been that has driven him to seek such a relief.

But she soon perceived that her son was perfectly sober.

"The chance has been against me, mother; I have drawn a bad number!" he said, as he sat down on the bench by the side of the long table, just inside the kitchen door. He looked haggard, as if worn out by fatigue.

"We have known it hours ago, my son! All the lads have been back at Santa Lucia

a long time ; and all free except poor Niccolo Bossi and you, my poor boy ! Where have you been, and what have you been doing, Beppo *mio* ?”

“I don’t know, mother ! I came away as soon as I had drawn my number ! I don’t know how I have been so long on the road ; I was thinking of other things.”

“And yet, Beppo *mio*,” said Sunta, looking wistfully at him with the tears in her eyes, “it was not for want of doing the best I could. There was not one of them,” she continued, alluding to the mothers of the lads whose drawing had placed them out of danger of being called on to serve, and speaking with a strong sense of the injustice which had been done her,—“there was not one of them who did as much as I did ! I burned two candles of half a pound each at the altar of the Seven Sorrows, and I promised two more if things went well—best wax, and half a pound each, my son ! There was no other who did so much !”

“There was no other of them, mother, who had a son with a malediction on him !” said he, looking up at her with profound dejection. “There was no other of the men as willing to go

as to stay, no other that was as tired of his life as I am of mine !”

“ Oh, Beppo, Beppo ! my son, my son ! do not speak such words. You shall not go to serve ; no, not if I sell all the linen in the great press ! It’s mine. My hands spun the yarn, mine and the girl’s together. You shall not go, my Beppo, if I sell the last bit of it ; and there’s the spinning of four-and-twenty years !”

“ Oh, mother, mother, mother !” cried Beppo, to whose mind his mother’s mention of the share “ the girl ” had had in producing all that linen, had brought back the vision of the quiet happy times when Giulia used to sit by the kitchen fire, or out in the loggia, plying her spindle, and when a skittish word from her was the worst grief in connection with her ; “ Oh, mother, I am very miserable !”

“ But I tell thee, my son, that thou shalt not go ! I will speak to the curate—any way thou shalt not go !”

“ Mother, I don’t care to stay, I tell you ! I had rather go, and never see Bella Luce again ! Oh, mother, mother !”

“ Don’t say such words !—don’t say them !” reiterated the old woman. She had poured out

all the comfort she had to give, to the uttermost extent of her power; and she could say no more.

"Mother! that poor girl! Why did you send her away from you? Why did you send her to her destruction?"

"*Misericordia!*" exclaimed the old woman, as this new light broke in upon her mind; "is *that* the reason why you don't care to stay at Bella Luce any more, or ever to see the place again? Why, Beppo, my son, she was a good-for-nought! She was not worthy of so much as a look from thee!"

"Mother! mother! She was as good a girl as ever breathed!" said Beppo; with a sob in his voice; "you know she was, mother!"

"I did think she was; but you ask his reverence! Ask the priest, my son. He knows the truth."

"Yes! and I know the truth! If she is bad now, who has made her so? Who sent her to the cursed city to her destruction? Poor child, all by herself amid good-for-nothing people! They are all bad in the cities, mother, all of them. Who sent Giulia there? when it was better,—twenty times over better,—to send her to her grave!"

"Why, you know, Beppo, as well as I do, that the priest said it was for the best. It was little enough either your father or I had to say in the matter. Signor Sandro—and he is a very good man, and a sponable—said it was a good thing; but your father would never have sent her for all that, without the priest. He said it was the best that could be done for her;—you know he did."

And from the insistence of *la Signora Sunta's* pleading, it might be inferred that she was not altogether easy at heart about the sending out of the poor girl from under her roof, to what she fully believed to have been her ruin. Nevertheless, the idea that it could have been otherwise than right to do as the priest had advised in the matter, was very far from presenting itself to her mind.

"I know this," replied Beppo, "that you and *babbo* and the lawyer and the priest together have sent—body and soul—to ruin the poor girl who was brought up in your house, and who was once the best as well as the loveliest I ever saw, or shall see. She was! she was good!"

It was the time of his farewell meeting with her under the cypress-tree in the path, that

his mind recalled to him as the epoch up to which it was certain that she had been good and true.

"I know," he continued, with a tremor in his voice, and with tears in his eyes,—“I know that she is worthless now. And the knowledge that she is so, mother, is ten times worse to me than losing her! It makes me mad to think of it! And that is why I have no care what becomes of me, and would rather die than live! Mother! I am so miserable!”

That refrain came like the inarticulate cry which is the first-taught of all Nature's lessons to every living creature, the instinctive bringing of all pain and trouble to the mother for assuagement and consolation. But the patient's woes had got beyond the sphere of maternal surgery. Sunta would have died for her first-born; and she *did* get to the length of articulately telling him that she would sell all the linen in the great press for him. She had no words to go beyond this. If there was anything beyond in the maternal heart, it was away in the dimly seen abysses which none of us ever fully sound, and which, Sunta had never so much as looked into, and had to remain unrecognised and unspoken.

"I would give thee ease, Beppo, if I knew how," she said. "To-morrow thou shalt speak with the priest; he will tell thee what is best. And now get to bed, my son! Thou look'st as if thou hadst not rested for a twelvemonth: and my eyes, too, are heavy."

"Good night, mother!"

And with that the stricken man crept off to the bed-room, where his brother was soundly sleeping.

The next morning he rose to go forth to his work in the fields as usual. He found it less difficult to do that than it had been to find his blinded way through the unwonted occupations of the day before. Habit stood his friend, in guiding his limbs to do their office in the accustomed labour, unaided by any mental guidance.

There passed but short communication between the father and the son as they went forth to the field.

"So thou hadst no luck, *figliuolo mio*!" said the old man, with a snarl that seemed to partake of the expression of a sneer; "and the infidel man-stealers must take thee! The Vannis were never lucky!"

"The chance was against me, father, and I must take my chance," said Beppo.

That was all ! The old man said nothing more, but he had many things in his mind.

Carlo appeared to be in a specially communicative mood that morning,—one would have said he was in high good humour even.

"This is a very sad business," he said to his elder brother, when their father was at a distance ; "a bad business for Bella Luce ! How the farm is to go on without you, Beppo, I don't see. *Babbo* and I put together are not worth you ! And yet he don't mean to come down with the money ! You'll have to march, Beppo ; unless, indeed, you take the priest's advice, and do as he would have you."

"I don't care much about it, Carlo. They may settle it which way they choose, for me," said Beppo, listlessly.

It was not, however, a matter of indifference to Carlo which way the matter was settled. The priest had said—and Carlo implicitly believed him—that the taking to the hills would involve no lasting consequences ; that it would be but for a short time—till the soldiers were gone out of the country. All would then be blown over, and

Beppo would return to resume his place as eldest son and heir at Bella Luce. But if he were to join the army, away to the north of the mountains in Piedmont, to fight against the Austrians, perhaps even to cross the Alps, who knows what might happen! It seemed to Carlo's imagination very unlikely that any man should come back again from such a going away! And then—

“If they are to settle it for you, it'll be . . .” and he made a gesture which was sufficiently expressive of “over the hills and far away.” “But,” he continued, “I don't know that if I were in your place, Beppo—and I wish with all my heart I were, for the good of the family, I do—that I would let it be settled for me that way. Soldiering is a bad trade, I know, mostly; but there is such a thing as thriving at it. And if any man in the world could, it would be such a strapping fellow as you. It would be a fine thing to come back with a title to your name, and a couple of gold epaulettes on your shoulders! Captain Vanni, or General Vanni, mayhap, who knows? would sound very well. And, *per Bacco!* what a handsome fellow you would look, all gold and colours, with a long sword rattling by your side, like one of those officers down in the town

yonder, that all the girls look after when they pass down the street!"

"Ay, or better still, what a handsome corpse I should make, lying full length on the broad of my back, with an Austrian bullet through my heart! shouldn't I, Carlo?" said his brother, with a dreary smile, which was half satire on the thoughts that he knew very well were in Carlo's heart, and half genuine acquiescence on his own part in the truth of the proposition.

"Oh!—if you are afraid of that—!" said Carlo, shrugging his shoulders.

"I don't feel as if I was very much afraid!" replied Beppo, quietly, while his eyes looked out into the distance of the seaward landscape, with that expression of vaguely searching which is so apt to accompany the musings of those who feel that all immediately around them has become flat, stale, and unprofitable.

"I know one, at all events, who would look at you in a different sort of way, and speak in a different sort of way, if you was to come back to Bella Luce, or to Fano, as the case might be, Captain, ay, or even Corporal Vanni!"

Carlo fancied that he was feeling his way delicately to hint at a consideration which he

dared not urge more directly. But the spot in his brother's heart which he had ventured to touch was sore and sensitive to a degree of which he had no idea. He had already gone far beyond the tolerance of a temper which, placid as it ordinarily was, had been tried by an excess of agony that had left every nerve quivering. The allusion, especially that implied in the last words his brother had uttered, was more than he could bear.

He stood for an instant glaring at Carlo, and then brandishing the heavy triangular spade he had in his hand above his head, he after a moment's pause hurled it far away from him into the field.

Carlo, who had been at first startled and frightened by his brother's movement, recovered himself as soon as the tremendous weapon was at a distance.

"What did you throw away your spade for?" he said, with a half sneer.

"For fear of the curse of Cain!" said Beppo. "Now I am going to pick it up. Don't come after me! Let me work by myself this morning; and never dare again, if you don't want your blood to be on my head, to breathe a word or

a hint to me of—of—of what you had in your mind just now.”

And Beppo walked away to pick up his spade, and worked in a furrow by himself during the rest of the morning.

His brawny limbs went on with their mechanical task ; but his mind was busy in meditating on the point which he had told his brother that others might settle for him. The priest was desirous, Carlo reminded him, that he should avoid the conscription by flight to the mountains. It was natural to him, and a life-long habit, to be guided obediently by any suggestions from that source. Besides, Beppo had—or rather had had, when he cared for anything—as strong a repugnance to the military service as any of his fellow Romagnoles. But now it seemed to him as if that lot was best which took him farthest away, and most irrevocably separated him from Bella Luce, and all its surroundings and memories. Nevertheless he was conscious of a longing he could not conquer to remain within the possibility of hearing of Giulia, and her future conduct. Was it that that sudden departure from the hall of the drawing, and Lisa’s point-blank assertion respecting the cause of it, had again lighted up a

faint spark of hope in his mind? He speculated upon it again and again; and though each time he arrived at the conclusion that it was an absurdity to allow any weight to such a chance circumstance, in the face of what he had seen and heard at the house of *la Dossi*, and what he had since heard from the priest himself, and also, though differently coloured, from Signor Sandro, yet he could not prevent his mind from recurring to the fact, and Lisa's explanation of it. And if there were the faintest spark of hope that, despite all, Giulia still loved him—and girls *were* so difficult to understand, that all things in such matters were possible;—in that case he would not quit the neighbourhood for all the world,—no, not for all the epaulettes King Victor Emmanuel had the bestowing of!

The result of these meditations was that, by the time the hour of repose arrived, he had determined on a line of conduct; and it was well that he had been able to do so, for just as the silent dinner at the farm-house had come to a conclusion, and the farmer and his sons were lounging out of the kitchen door, to enjoy as they best might the after-dinner hour of repose, Don Evandro made his appearance, and after a word

of greeting to Signor Paolo, and a few of condolence for the misfortune which had fallen on the family to *la sposa*, intimated his desire to speak a few words to Beppo. Beppo had been about to put his hour of rest to profit by getting a little sleep, of which he stood so much in need. But of course he roused himself to do the priest's bidding; and at his invitation, strolled with him along the path leading to the village. The priest was aware of the readiness and acuteness of his friend Carlo's ears, and he chose that his conversation upon this occasion should not be overheard by them.



CHAPTER II.

A PAIR OF CONSPIRATORS.



OUR number was one hundred and one, I hear, Signor Beppo!" said the priest.

"Yes! your reverence, that was my number!" answered the young man.

"What is the number of men demanded by the excommunicated government?"

"Somewhere between seventy and eighty from our district, I believe, your reverence. I don't know exactly."

"And it don't signify to know exactly, worse luck! Of course it is quite certain that one hundred and one will be far within the number that will be wanted to make up the roll."

"I suppose so, your reverence! no doubt of it. Of course they all know that it was as safe to have to march as number one."

"And what do you mean to do, my young friend?" asked the priest with a manner expressive of much sympathy.

"I have not thought much about it yet, your reverence," said Beppo, without being aware how far his words deviated from representing the exact truth.

"But you must think ; and think very seriously too, my son ! It is a matter requiring very much consideration. You are aware, from what I said the other day, that I cannot in conscience advise your father to bring forward the sum necessary for procuring a substitute. Indeed, if it were his purpose to do so, I should feel it to be my bounden duty to use my utmost influence to dissuade him from it. You must have understood, I think, the nature of my views on this point. And I can assure you that they are shared almost without exception by my brother priests throughout the country."

"I dare say your reverence is very right."

"You have not nourished any expectation then, I suppose, that your father should interfere to such a purpose?"

"Not the least, your reverence."

"Well, then we come to the question, what

course you mean to pursue," said the priest, again looking hard into the young man's face. "You may speak to me, my son," he continued, "with all openness, not only as the old friend of your family, but as your own parish priest, whose bounden duty it is to assist you with his counsel in every difficulty. And remember, that what you say to me in that capacity is as sacred as if it were said in the confessional. If you feel that you could speak more freely under the protection of that holy sacrament, you have only to say so, and I am ready to hear you in confession. It is the intention and not the confessional that makes the sacredness of the rite, my son."

"In truth, father, I have little to say either in confession or otherwise. The fact is, that I do not seem to care so much about going for a soldier as I did, before— before— before I had been made very unhappy by——."

"I know what is in your heart, my son, as well as if you had spoken it," said the priest, with a compassionate sigh. "My son, you have suffered and are suffering the penalty inseparable from having bestowed affection where it was not deserved,—where the older and wiser friends who knew that there were none of the qualities which

should have called it forth, warned you not to place it. You cannot say, my son, that you were unwarned ; or that if your heart had been more chastened and docile, the misery which has fallen on you would not have been spared you. You must feel that, Beppo *mio*."

There was a long pause, during which the young man kept his eyes fixed on the ground.

"Any way," he said at last, with a profound sigh, "the misery which your reverence seems to know I am suffering, has made me care little about this other trouble of the conscription."

"But it is my duty, my son, to warn you that recklessness is the frame of mind in which, above all others, the eternal enemy of our souls finds an easy conquest. I will not insist on the fact, that the day will surely come when you will look back on the feelings and passions which are now tormenting you, as on the disquietudes of a troubled dream ; when new hopes and new objects will have grown up in your mind, and all that now appears to you of such vast moment will have faded away, and be looked back on by you with a contemptuous smile. I will not preach to you of this, although it is as certain as that the weary body, when it has been refreshed by repose and

food, no longer feels its weariness ; because I know how difficult it is for youth to credit it, or to conceive it. But I will remind you, *figliuolo mio*, that there are other grounds on which this question should be decided, besides your own mere liking and inclination. There are duties of the most sacred kind in question. If you were to go for a soldier, as you say, for what cause would you be fighting ?”

“There are many, your reverence, who say that it would be against the Austrians, who certainly have no right to rule over us in Italy ; and that it would be for the good of the country, and to make Italy better and happier in all ways.”

“Many who say !” retorted the priest, with infinite scorn in his voice ; “but who are they who say so ? Have you heard any of God’s ministers say so ? Have any of those who are your appointed guides and teachers, told you so ? You cannot be expected to know much of politics or history. But you know that this country was governed by our Holy Father the Pope, and that his government has been turned out, and his property stolen by force. That cannot be right ! You know that the king who has done this wrong, and who wants to take

you to fight in his wrongful cause, is excommunicated. That cannot deserve the blessing of Heaven! If you do not know, it is my bounden duty to tell you, that the curses of excommunication will rest on all those who make themselves partakers of this infidel king's guilt, by taking his part, or fighting under his banner. Even taking your own view of the sorrows which have come upon you, as a consequence of refusing to be guided by your natural and appointed guides and friends, even admitting that there is no more prospect or hope for you in this world—if it were possible for an instant to suppose such folly—even if it were so, is that a reason for forfeiting all hope in the next world also? Because you see nothing but misery before you in this life, will you for that reason ensure misery in the life to come also? It is a small matter that this impious government hurries away the bodies of its unfortunate victims to slaughter on the field of battle! It carries them to die excommunicated, and lost for ever! Can you wonder at it, that we, who have the charge of your souls, should be earnest and instant to save you at all hazards from such a fate!"

The priest remained silent for awhile to give this tirade time to do its work. And Beppo remained silent also, intently striving to see his mental way among the conflicting notions and ideas that had found their entrance into his mind from different sources. But the priest's unfailing and most powerful ally in the work of subjugating a human soul—a sore conscience—was absent. It was easy to keep old Paolo Vanni in a state of subjection by the exhibition of similar threats and terrors. For he had that within which could only be drugged to sleep by sacerdotal soothing-syrup. And in the case of his son, the priest had all the advantage of a hazy and clouded intelligence to deal with. But it was curious to see how the clear conscience of honest rectitude struggled against the conclusion the priest sought to force upon it, even though the intelligence was unable to detect any one error in all his theory.

After musing for awhile, Beppo looked up with his clear blue honest eyes, not at the priest, but to the blue vault above him, and said :

“All that your reverence has said seems very true! And yet, somehow or other, I can't get to feel afraid God will be angry with

me in this matter. I have no thought to do wrong!"

It did not in any way suit the priest's purpose to enter into a dissertation on any of the monstrous heresies and errors involved in this wholly irregular profession of faith. So he contented himself with saying :

"That is because He knows that you are about to be guided in the right path. The wish to do right, joined, my son, to docility towards those whom God has appointed to show you the right, is always sufficient to secure the blessing of a peaceful conscience. But, it happens in this case, as it generally does happen, that considerations of worldly prudence are also on the same side as duty towards Heaven. Remember what, when the Papal government is restored to this unhappy country, which will assuredly be the case very shortly,—in a few months, probably, as I understand,—will be the situation of those who have deserted their natural allegiance to fight for the usurper;—of them, and of their families! Surely you would not, even if there were no other consideration to influence you, you would not bring down ruin and disgrace upon your poor old father! We clergy have no commission to speak

to our flocks about the intentions of the restored government. But I may tell you, Signor Beppo, between ourselves, and speaking as an old friend, rather than in my character of your pastor, that it will go very hard with the families of those who have assisted in the sacrilege of rebellion against the legitimate authority. Certainly, confiscation of all property, and most probably imprisonment also ! Once again, I say, can you wonder that as a friend, as well as in the character of a priest, I should be anxious to prevent you from committing this sin, and at the same time this worldly imprudence ?”

On this ground poor Beppo was more entirely unable to contend with his tempter, than on the theological one. Mankind is provided with no internal voice to whisper to them of political probabilities. And Beppo had no reason for not believing every word that the priest had said on that head.

“ I am sure we are all very much obliged to your reverence,” he said ; “ of course I would not willingly do anything that should injure my father or Carlo, or bring any sorrow upon my mother.”

“ I am sure you would not, Beppo ; and these

considerations alone should suffice to decide you in favour of the course I was speaking of the other evening at the farm."

"But is your reverence sure that I might not be bringing them into trouble in some way by going against the present government? They, at all events, have the power in their hands now!"

"Yes! but they have a great deal too much upon their hands to look after one such fellow as you, Beppo! And besides that, they are too much afraid to make the people hostile to them. There is discontent against them enough, as it is. They will think twice before they do any thing to increase it. In taking part with the real government against the usurper, you will have all the really good men in the country with you. In the other case, there will be nobody to stand between you and the just anger of the Pontifical authorities!"

"Well," said Beppo, "it is a hard thing for a poor ignorant man, such as I am, your reverence, to tell how to act when popes and kings are at variance, and both parties claim his obedience; but I will be guided by your reverence in this matter, if you, on your part, will do one thing

to please me;—and I am sure that it is a good Christian deed for any priest to do.”

“Well, what is your condition, *figliuolo mio*?” said the priest, with much surprise and a little displeasure in his voice; “I am not in the habit of making conditions with my parishioners, when I find it necessary for their welfare to advise them to any particular line of conduct. Nevertheless, if it is in my power to do you a pleasure, you know that I shall be happy to do so. You need not have made a condition of it. I must say, indeed, that it would have been more becoming to have mentioned your wish in any other way.”

“I humbly ask your reverence’s pardon,” said poor Beppo; “but I have been hard pushed by sorrow and trouble. And if your reverence would think it well to do this thing for me, it might be the saving of two souls; not of one only—for, to say the truth, I am well-nigh desperate with trouble!”

“Saving of souls, *figliuolo mio*, is more my business than yours. It is not seemly for the laity, let alone the uninstructed laity, to speak of such matters too lightly. It may well be, that you are a very incompetent judge of what may

tend to the saving of souls, which you speak of so glibly." For the priest began to suspect, that the good deed to be asked of him might be nothing less than the taking of some step for the bringing together of Beppo and Giulia, and he had no intention to do anything for the saving of their souls in that direction. "Nevertheless," he added, "let me hear what it is that you would have me do. I should wish to content you, if it were only to soothe the pain of the misfortune that has fallen upon you. If it be anything that my duty and conscience make lawful to me, I will not refuse you."

"Your reverence no doubt remembers," said Beppo, with a deep sigh, and after a little hesitation, "all the sad account you were giving my father and mother the other night of—of my unfortunate cousin?"

"Assuredly, it has been a matter of great concern to me. I fear there is little good to be hoped for her."

"She was a good girl as long as she was with us at Bella Luce, your reverence."

"She was good as long as she had no opportunity of being otherwise. What can be thought

of that goodness, my son, which is apt to vanish at the first approach of temptation?"

"Yet we pray, my father, that we may not be led into temptation," said Beppo, submissively.

The priest looked at him with astonishment. He could not have imagined, that slow, simple Beppo had ever thought as much of what he was taught to pray, still less that he had the wit so to make application of the fruit of his thinking. But the priest neither guessed how intensely Beppo had suffered, nor knew what a powerful forcer and ripener of the intelligence such suffering is.

"Be cautious and chary, my son, in attempting to apply the sentiments with which we are taught to approach the heavenly throne, to the relationship of man with his fellows. We pray that our Heavenly Father may lead us not into temptation, but we must none the less try the strength of our own good resolutions, by measuring them against such temptations as He does in his wisdom nevertheless think fit to lead us into. Your cousin was placed in no circumstances of exceptional temptation, beyond that which most girls are exposed to, but—we know the result. I think it must have at last con-

vinced you, my son, that those who strove to prevent you from so placing your affections were your best friends and wisest counsellors."

"At all events, father, it was in consequence of the wish of those friends to prevent me from doing so, that she was sent away from her home to the life which has been fatal to her. At all events, she has been sacrificed to what those friends considered to be my advantage. But now that that advantage has been secured," said the young man, speaking with increasing bitterness, "now that I have been made miserable, and she has been made worthless, surely some effort might be made to remedy as far as may be yet possible, the evil that has been done."

"I tell you, my son, such a mode of looking at the matter is mistaken. The evil you speak of was not *done*, it was discovered only. The girl was a bad girl, would have been a bad girl under any circumstances. The circumstances which occurred gave us an opportunity of seeing that such was the case, that is all. And as for remedy, the matter is past that, I am afraid."

"Nevertheless, although we may be afraid that it is past remedy, let us at least try. Let us at least do our part, by taking her away

from the temptations which have been fatal to her ! ”

It is true that if poor Beppo's heart could have been anatomised and analysed, there would have been found a very considerable and indestructible residuum of Corporal Tenda in the ashes of it ;—true that when he spoke of removing Giulia from temptation, the temptation he had in his mind was Corporal Tenda ;—true also that, despite his representations to his own heart, that all was for ever over between him and Giulia, and this talk to the priest about the object of sending her away having been secured, he would that instant have thought himself the happiest of men, and have rushed into her arms, if only Giulia would have told him that she *did* love him, and did *not* love the Corporal ; nevertheless he was perfectly sincere in representing, that he had no notion of there ever more being a question of love between them ; and in basing his wish that she should be taken from Fano on the ground of the simple moral and religious duty of endeavouring to reform her conduct.

Poor Beppo ! his mind had been so entirely abused by the report of the priest, joined to what he had himself seen, and to the few words dropped

by the attorney, which, though they spoke of the Corporal in different terms from those used by the priest, yet equally testified to Giulia's monstrous falseness to himself (and when was ever lover, who did not deem *that* the one damning and irremissible sin against morality!), that he really felt that it was a question of snatching a brand from the burning. But I am glad for both their sakes that Giulia did not hear her respectable and moral cousin thus treating her as a Magdalen, and making her the subject of reformatory philanthropy.

"But even supposing, that any good were to be done by so removing her, what is it you would propose, Signor Beppo?" asked the priest, in reply to his companion's last words.

They had strolled up, during their talk, about half-way to Santa Lucia, and were now under the great cypress-tree in the path. Oh! If Giulia could have known that it was just there, of all places in the world, that Beppo was concerting a scheme for rescuing her from the moral dangers of improper flirtations with—other men! Oh! if the little green lizards which were basking in the sun among the crevices of the old trunk, and were perking up their heads every now and then,

evidently to listen to what was being said, could have blabbed to her what they heard,—that, if anything, might have given Corporal Tenda a chance, and the freehold farm at Cuneo a mistress!

“What would I propose, your reverence? Why simply to undo what was done. To recall Giulia back again to Bella Luce.”

“Have her back again here!” said the priest, thoughtfully.

“I should be absent, you know, *padre mio*,” urged Beppo, ruefully.

“You would be absent!” said the priest, pulling his underlip with his forefinger and thumb, as he considered the matter.

“Since I should be either in the ranks, or away among the hills,” rejoined Beppo.

“But what would Signor Paolo say?” asked the priest.

“Oh! your reverence knows that my father would be entirely guided by you in the matter. A word from you would bring her back, just as a word from you sent her away.”

“And if I were to see no objection to acting in this matter as you would have me,”—— said the priest.

"I should see none in acting as *you* would have *me*, your reverence," said Beppo.

"I presume you would wish that Giulia should not return home till after you have left Bella Luce?" asked the priest, with a look of observation at Beppo's face as he spoke.

"Oh, certainly not—by no means. Immediately afterwards, but not before," replied Beppo, with a sincerity in his manner that quite convinced the *curato* of his openness and frankness in the matter.

"Well," replied the latter, "I do not see that there is much objection to it; and I do not think your father will make any difficulty about it. I am not so sure that the girl herself will be well pleased to return to her old home."

"I am afraid we have but too good reason to be sure, your reverence, that she will not return willingly. But surely that ought not to prevent us from taking the step in her best interest!" returned Beppo.

"Oh, no! no reason at all, of course. Some few days of notice, I suppose, must be given to that actress-woman with whom she has been placed. And, on the other hand, some little preparation and forethought will be necessary respecting

your——” and the priest finished his sentence by the same expressive gesture which Carlo had used to signify being away to the mountains.

“ Oh, your reverence, it's very little preparation I should need,” said Beppo, speaking in a very dejected tone.

“ Ay, ay! but—I told you, *figliuolo mio*, that the lads who go out to avoid serving this government will not want for friends; that we shall have our eyes on them; and that means will be taken to aid them in securing their safety. I shall take care—but I must have time to communicate with—in short, some little time is necessary. When is the day that is appointed for the medical examination?”

“ The first week of next month, I was told, your reverence.”

“ Oh! we have good fifteen days, then. Very good. It is more time than enough.”

“ Will your reverence, then, speak to my father, and cause notice to be given to *la Signora Dossi* that *la Giulia* is to leave her? And Signor Sandro should be told also, I suppose?”

“ Yes. I will come down to the farm this evening, and talk to your father after supper. I am sure I hope that a return to *Bella Luce* may

be the means, under Heaven, of in some degree reclaiming the unhappy girl. And I most sincerely rejoice, my young friend, that your eyes have been opened on the subject; and that you are at last aware what a fatal step any engagement with such a person would have been. Good day. I will not fail to come down this evening."

So the two conspirators separated: the priest returning up the hill to the dinner which was waiting for him, to *la Nunziata's* great displeasure, at the Cura; and Beppo to return to his afternoon work in the fields as usual.

And in the evening the priest came down to the farm, as he said he would. And when, after a private conversation with the old farmer in the *loggia*, in which it was finally settled that Beppo was to be found missing some morning towards the end of the following week, Don Evandro remarked, that as he would be absent some time from Bella Luce, and as the girl seemed to be getting no good in the town, it might be as well, perhaps, if she were brought back to the farm. Signor Paolo made no objection. *La padrona*, when this part of the deliberations of her lord and master and his prime minister was communicated, was delighted at the prospect of having

once again at her command those active and industrious fingers, the absence of which was making itself very sensibly felt in the diminished amount of the weekly produce of yarn.

The precise day for Beppo's secret departure, and the exact direction of his flight, were reserved for further and more detailed arrangement between him and the priest. Notice, however, was to be given to Signor Sandro, who was to be requested to communicate to *la Signora Dossi* that the farmer would come to Fano to fetch Giulia home on the Sunday week.



CHAPTER III.

A CONFESSION.

WHEN Lisa was left alone with Giulia, at the corner of the little lane leading to the *osteria* frequented by the *contadini* from the Santa Lucia part of the country, in the manner that has been described at the close of the last book of this history, she was not a little frightened at the state in which Giulia was, and not a little indignant against Beppo for his conduct. She was not aware, it will be remembered, how much reason he had for being angry. She knew nothing, in the first place, of the scene under the cypress, which alone gave Beppo any right to tax Giulia with falsehood; nor, in the second place, had she witnessed the unfortunate scene in the great hall of *la Dossi's* house, having been more agreeably

occupied herself the while in that slumbering lady's quiet sitting-room ; nor could she guess that Beppo's mind had been poisoned by the malicious insinuations, to which what he had himself seen lent such unlucky confirmation.

Giulia had swooned, and, to Lisa's great terror, did not recover herself for some minutes. Fainting fits are not so common on the shores of the Adriatic as they are in some other latitudes, and the nature of them, consequently, is not so well understood. Lisa feared that her friend was dying, killed by Beppo's cruel words !

The two girls were on their way from the *palazzo pubblico*—where poor Giulia had already received a shock from the announcement of Beppo's bad number, which, despite all her efforts, she had been unable to conceal from Lisa—to the house of *la Signora Dossi*, when they had met Beppo on his way to his inn. The spot was an unfrequented one ; and to-day, when everybody in the city was in the great square before the *palazzo pubblico*, it was absolutely solitary. There was not a human being within sight or within call. It was a great comfort to Giulia as soon as she recovered her senses ; but it considerably increased little Lisa's embarrassment and distress in the

meantime. She hung over her, calling to her again and again by her name in increasing terror, and imploring her to answer her, or at least make some sign, if she could not speak.

At last the colour began to come back into her ghastly pale cheeks, and she opened her eyes. After wearily and languidly looking round her for a moment or two, she said:

"Oh yes! I remember it all now! Lisa, dear, how long have I been asleep? Why did you not wake me up? Did I fall down, or how was it?"

"Yes, dear, you fell down! And, oh me, I was so frightened! I thought you were dead or dying! Do you think you can stand up? Do you feel ill?"

"I can get up now," said Giulia, doing so as she spoke by the help of Lisa's hand.

"Are you ill, dear?"

"I feel very strange—much as if I had been stunned. But I am better now. I can walk home, I think, though I feel a little giddy."

"Lean on me, dear! It will be a long time before I can forgive Signor Beppo, I can tell him. *E proprio da contadino!*" said Lisa, using the townsfolk's usual expression for sig-

nifying anything bearish, or unmannered or ignorant.

"Ah! now it all comes back to me!" said Giulia, with a long-drawn sigh. "Ah, yes! now I remember it all! Poor Beppo!"

"Poor Beppo *davvero!* He ought to be ashamed of himself! I never heard of a man behaving in such a way. To say such horrid words!"

"Yes, Lisa dear, they were very dreadful words to hear; but—but—but it is not all his fault."

"It is true, he had just drawn a bad number, and no doubt he was much put about. But that's no excuse for treating a girl as he did you!"

"Yes, he drew a bad number; and he won't like to leave the country; poor Beppo! but—but that was not all that vexed him, Lisa."

"Let what would vex him, he had no business to speak as he did!"

"He said I was false and worthless! But I have not been false!" sobbed poor Giulia, and the tears began to overflow her eyes.

"False! how should you be false? I have been hearing any time this two years from him of his love for you, and how you never would listen to

him, nor look at him! What business can he have to talk about falseness then, I should like to know? I was all in his favour, and hoped you and he might come together,—mainly because I didn't want him myself, as you know, dear! But now, upon my word, I think you had better listen to the Corporal. Signor Giacopo says he is as good a little man as ever stepped, and will have a snug little bit of land of his own when his uncle dies."

"Nonsense, Lisa;—what nonsense you are talking. You can't really think that there can ever be anything serious between Corporal Tenda and me! He has no more thought of it than I have."

"Well! I am sure I don't see why you should not, nor why he should not. My belief is, that he thinks a great deal about you in serious earnest."

"Oh, don't, Lisa, don't say such things; I don't like it!"

"Why not? If there was nothing between you and the Corporal, what was it put Signor Beppo into such a dreadful passion? And why did you say it was not all his fault? Whose fault was it, then?"

"Why,—Corporal Tenda's fault!" said Giulia, blushing a little and speaking with some hesita-

tion. "He will go on in such a way! And Beppo made me angry that day. And I spoke unkindly to him," said Giulia; and the tears again ran down her cheeks, and her voice was broken by suppressed sobbing; "—and when the Corporal laughed at him, I laughed too; and I could have knocked my head against the wall afterwards. And I hate Corporal Tenda, Lisa!"

"I am sure you don't seem to hate him, Giulia! What is he always coming to the house for? And why do you let him come into the kitchen, and talk and laugh and go on?" said Lisa, the last phrase having in similar context, it will be observed, the force of an "*et cetera*," and being capable of a very extended significance.

"How can I help it?" replied Giulia, not without a certain amount of self-consciousness which imparted a degree of embarrassment to her manner, and a little extra colour to her cheeks. "He will go on in such a way, and he makes me laugh in spite of myself; and he is so different, you know, from our own *paesani* [the people of our village]; and Beppo does not understand such ways; and—and—what could I do, you know, Lisa dear? Could I seem for all the world as if I was breaking my heart, because I had been sent away from

Bella Luce, and I sent away because they were afraid that I—that I should listen to Beppo? Could I now, Lisa dear? And Don Evandro himself told me the night before I came away” (here a pause, while certain other reminiscences connected with that same night caused a little half-suppressed but audible sob, not perfectly intelligible to Lisa)—“the night before I came away, that I was not to shut myself up like a nun, but was to make acquaintance with any people that fell in my way; and—and—and that’s all I did, you know, Lisa!”

“Any way, let Signor Beppo have been pleased or not pleased with your knowing the Corporal, he had no business to speak in that way, seeing that he never had any right to think that you cared about him!” said Lisa, still indignant at the way she had seen poor Giulia treated. “And I, like a fool, to go telling him that you took on so when he drew the bad number! I don’t wonder you were vexed at me for saying so!”

“But, Lisa dear—come in just a moment.” They had, as Lisa was speaking, reached the great entrance of the Bollandini palace. “Just come up-stairs a moment; I want—I want to speak to you.”

So the two girls went up the great stairs together, and sat down on the stone window-seat of the large window at right angles with the door of *la Dossi's* apartment, by which the staircase was lighted. The great staircase was as silent and as solitary as the grave, and *la Dossi* was doubtless busy in superintending the progress of her *casseroles*.

"Look here," continued Giulia, who had taken her pocket-handkerchief from her pocket, and busied her hands and eyes with folding it and re-folding it on her lap, "Lisa dear. You must not be too hard on Beppo. I suppose he thought that—that I was different from when we parted at Bella Luce."

"Different ! How different ? If you had always refused to listen to him, why should you not be free to listen as much as you pleased to the Corporal or to anybody else ?"

There is nothing so provoking in some circumstances as a confidant who will see nothing but the plain logical meaning of what is said to them. Lisa *would* be so deplorably reasonable. Giulia could not fold her handkerchief to her satisfaction. Yet it was not for want of giving all her eyes to the operation. She tried again and again ; and

even her shoulders seemed to writhe and twist themselves with the difficulty of the task. Presently, too, her foot began to beat the pavement with nervous impatience. The handkerchief *would* not get folded right.

"But — perhaps — Beppo — thought — that — thought — that — I did care for him!" and each word came as if it had been squeezed out of her by some mechanical means that forced out a little panting groan with it.

"But the question is, what right had he to think so?" said the pitilessly logical Lisa.

"And — and you said just now, Lisa, yourself, that I did not seem to hate Corporal Tenda."

"And why should you hate him? He is a very nice little man."

"And Beppo, perhaps, thought I seemed not to hate him — though I *do*! I do, Lisa!"

"And what if Beppo did think so? What right has he to object, I should like to know, if you liked the Corporal ever so much?"

"Because I told him once, Lisa, that — that — I — hated — all — men!"

"Meaning him in particular, of course. That is one way for a girl to tell a man that she cannot

love him. That don't bind her, I suppose, always to hate all the men she ever sees."

"But I told him, Lisa,"—and here the little panting groans became out-and-out sobs, and the difficulty with the handkerchief became so complicated that the fingers began to twitch and jerk at it in impatient desperation,—“I told him that I did *not* hate him !”

“Giulia! you told him that you hated all other men, and did not hate him. Oh, Giulia! that seems to me very like the same thing as telling him that you did love him.”

Then, at last, the flood-gates were opened, and the great pent-up deeps of poor Giulia's soul poured themselves forth.

“And I do!” she cried. “I do! I do! I *do* love him! I *do* love him better than all the world beside! And oh, Lisa, Lisa! I am so miserable—so very, very miserable. And I can do nothing but make misery for him! I could have kissed his feet when he was saying those dreadful things in the street, I could. Oh, Lisa! you don't know how good he is, and how true! And he thinks me false and worthless! Oh, me! oh, me! what shall I do? what shall I do? Oh, Lisa! I shall die! I shall break my heart!”

"And you do not care anything, then, for the Corporal?" said Lisa, much perplexed, but persisting in drawing her logical inferences, and putting two and two together.

"Lisa!" cried Giulia, turning on her with the air of an enraged tigress; "Lisa? how can you? I would tear him limb from limb, if it would do Beppo a service, or make him know that I was not false!"

"But why not tell him so, then? Why did you make him think, for these two years past, that you did not care for him?"

"What else could I do? And he rich, and his father's heir! And I living there upon their charity! And all of them watching me from morning till night to see if I so much as looked at him! To be told that I paid their charity by snaring the love of their son, because he was rich! My heart is breaking, Lisa—it is! But I would rather it should break, twenty times over, than live to hear that said. I wish I could die, Lisa! I wish I could die! But I am as strong as a horse!" she said, shaking her head, and stretching out, as she spoke, her two magnificently rounded and moulded arms in front of her, and gazing on them ruefully. "I wish I was *tisica*,

and could die ! Then Beppo might be told afterwards that I was not false, but loved him, oh, so dearly, so dearly ! And then he would be free to forget me, and marry some rich wife, according to his father's will."

"But if you as good as told him that you loved him——" persisted Lisa.

"But I did not. I told him there could never be any love between us : I told him that I would never love him. And now, must I not do all I can to make him believe me, and show him that I was in earnest ? Must not I all the more make him think that I do not care for him, if I let him see how much I did care when I left Bella Luce ? But it is very, very hard."

"I should tell him that I loved him," said Lisa.

"I cannot do it, Lisa. And you would not, if you had heard and seen the sneers and hints and all the cruel words that I have heard. I could not do it to save my soul. You will keep my secret, Lisa ?" she cried suddenly, half getting up, turning towards her companion, and seizing her hand in her own : "you will keep my secret ?"

"Of course I will, Giulia. Though I think you are wrong, your secret is safe."

"You promise—swear to me that you will breathe to no living soul what I have told you. I could not help telling you, because you were blaming Beppo, when it is I who ought to be blamed—only I."

"I swear to you that I will tell no one, unless you some day give me leave," replied Lisa.

"Ah! that time will never, never come in this world!" said Giulia, sighing heavily. "I must go in, or *la Dossi* will be wondering what has become of me. Are my eyes very red?"

"Yes, very; and you look like a ghost. You had better wash your eyes before you go to her; and tell her that the heat of the hall where the drawing was knocked you up. Good bye, dear! I shall see you again soon—perhaps this evening."

"Thanks, Lisa dear; come, if you can. But I hope Corporal Tenda will not come this afternoon. I should be more apt to cry than to laugh with him."

So Giulia let herself in with a latch-key; and Lisa returned down the great staircase alone, with a phase of human nature that was new to her to study.

Lisa could have told her friend, if she had seen

any necessity for doing so, that she would be disappointed in her hope that Corporal Tenda would not make his appearance that evening at the Palazzo Bollandini; for her own intention of returning was mainly due to an intimation to that effect, which she had found the means of conveying to Captain Brilli in the hall of the drawing; and there was very little doubt that the Corporal would accompany him.

La Signora Dossi's dinner, and therefore her *siesta*, took place at a later hour than usual that day, in consequence of the ceremony of the drawing for the conscription, which in the little city of Fano made that day an exceptional one. Giulia, when she went in to her mistress, was expected to give an account of all she had seen at the *palazzo pubblico*—how those who had escaped had rejoiced, and how those who had been hit bore their bad chance, &c. All which she did, poor girl, feeling all the time the heavy weight at her heart, not got rid of at all, but put by to be brought into the foreground again whenever she should have leisure to attend to it.

Then the dinner was got over; and Giulia had to be scolded because she did not eat, and had

to tell lies as best she could about the heat of the room and the fatigue, and so on.

And then *la Dossi* went to her *siesta*; and the time for bringing out the great heavy sorrow came round, and Giulia sat down in the silent house all by herself to think.

“Had she been to blame in the matter of the Corporal? Had she been to blame in the matter of that last parting under the great cypress-tree—that great event of her life—that most precious memory for all her future years?” She feared that she could not quite acquit herself on this latter head. It was a break-down; a fall from the line of duty that she had chalked out for herself. Had she been stronger on that occasion—had she made a better fight, Beppo would have had no reason to call her false. He would have been spared the suffering of thinking her so. Yet would he on the whole have been happier? Was it not possible that the remembrance of that moonlight farewell might, despite all, be as precious to him as it was to her? Yes, she had been wrong and weak on that occasion, but she found it very difficult to repent of the wrong-doing.

With respect to the Corporal, her conscience.

acquitted her more easily. Care about the little man, in any such sort as could make any lover or husband in the world jealous? *Che!* She had spoken the truth from the very bottom of her heart, when she had said to Lisa on the staircase that she could have annihilated the Corporal, if by so doing she could have served or pleased Beppo. He was less than nothing to her in comparison with him! Had she been pleased, more pleased than was right, with the evident admiration of the Corporal? Well! pleased? She had been amused by him. She had found it pleasant to talk to him; pleasant to laugh with him and at his joking. But her heart had been heavy, God knew it had been heavy, all the time! Would it have been judicious to remain glum and moody in *la Dossi's* house? She had come to the city with the firm determination not to wear the willow, to give no curious spy the slightest reason to sneer or suspect that she had left her heart at *Bella Luce*. Was it not absolutely necessary that she should do so? Would the Corporal have any right to think himself ill-used if she told him to-morrow that her heart was, and had long been, given to her cousin? Certainly not the least. If only

there were no other reasons for not doing so, how gladly, how triumphantly, would she tell him so to-morrow.

But was there any possibility that what Lisa had said might be true? Was it possible that the lively little man had mistaken her good-humour and frank courtesy, and was seriously thinking of her? Giulia thought not. But it behoved her at all events to take care that such should not be the case. But he was one of those men whom it is very difficult to keep at a distance; how different from poor, dear, dear, modest Beppo! It would be far more difficult to make Beppo believe that he was loved, than to make the Corporal understand that he was not. She wished with all her heart that he knew she had no love to give to any one—that it was all given away! She wished he knew all about Beppo, and her unhappiness. She felt sure that if he did, he would not quiz Beppo any more, and would respect her unfortunate attachment. For after all he was a good, honest-hearted little man. She felt sure of that. But how was she to behave to him when he came there? Here was already Lisa taking notions into her head. Good Heaven! if any such reports

should get about in the town, and should come to Beppo's ears! The mere thought made her blood run cold. It was evidently necessary that she should be more guarded in her manner to the Corporal, and when he came next——"

Exactly as Giulia reached that point in her meditations the bit of twine outside the magnificent walnut-wood door was pulled, and the little bell which hung on the inside of it tinkled. Before going across the great hall to open the door, she stepped lightly to the door of *la Dossi's* room, for the allotted time for her nap was just about completed, and, looking in, saw that, faithful to her habitudes, her mistress was awake and on the point of rising.

"There is somebody at the door, Signora," she said, "so I thought I would look to see if you were ready to receive any visitors. Shall I let them come in?"

"Yes! Let them come in, whoever it is, my girl! I have been alone all day till you came home, and I want to wag my tongue a little! Let them come in. I am coming out into the *salottino* in two minutes."

So Giulia went to the door, and there, as she

had feared, were Captain Brilli, and his shadow, Corporal Tenda.

"Good evening, Signora Giulia! Are we too early? Is the *padrona* stirring yet? May we come in?"

"*Si*, Signor Capitano! Walk in; my mistress is awake; she will be in the *salottino* in a minute! Good evening, Signor Caporale!"

"Gentilissima Signora Giulia!" said the Corporal, with a military salute, performed in a slightly exaggerated fashion; "I am delighted to see that you have not altogether deserted this sublunary world for your native skies, as I began to fear must be the case, when you vanished so suddenly from your place in the palazzo to-day! I was coming through the crowd to speak to you after your—guardian—ahem!—drew his bad number; and when I got across the hall, to that private box sort of a place they had put you to sit in, you had vanished, and the Signorina Lisa, too!"

"Did the Signorina Lisa say she was coming here this afternoon?" asked Captain Brilli.

"*Si*, *Signore*. At least she said that it was very likely she might come. She *said*, Signor Capitano, that she would come to see *me*!" said

Giulia, looking at him with a smile in her eye.

"Of course! For what else should she come?" said Brilli, in the same tone. "Did she say about what time she would be here?"

"Oh! I suppose about the hour of the *paneggiata*," replied Giulia. "Will your worships be pleased to walk into the drawing-room? I dare say *la Signora Dossi* has come out from her room by this time."

"I like a large airy room like this, I do," said the Corporal. "I think I had rather stay here while my officer goes to pay his respects to *la Signora Dossi*," he added, giving Giulia a look as he spoke that plainly uttered a very earnestly pleading entreaty that she would remain there also.

"As you please, Signor Caporale! The room is entirely at your service!" said Giulia, speaking with perfect good-humour, but evidently about to precede Captain Brilli into the sitting-room.

The Corporal stood looking after her as she crossed the great hall to the opposite door till she had just reached it, then springing after her with a hop, skip, and jump, he said:

"I think I won't stay here after all; I am disappointed in the big room. All its charm is leaving it,—leaving it now at this moment, and it seems very dull and cold all of a sudden. I think I shall like the sitting-room best!"

"As you please, Signor Caporale!" said Giulia, again with unaltering good-humour; "or, if your worship prefers to remain here, to being exposed to the cold of the great room, you are welcome to shut yourself in with the old sedan-chair in the corner!"

"Oh, Signora Giulia, you are cruel to-day! What have I done to offend you? Perhaps you were displeased at the result of the drawing this morning. But remember that I am not commander-in-chief,—at least not yet. I need hardly assure you that when I am, nobody shall be drawn except those whom your ladyship has no objection to see in the ranks. But in the meantime I confess I thought the blind goddess had done very well in sending the big cousin, who takes it upon himself to superintend the comings in and goings out of the most discreet as well as the loveliest young lady in all Romagna, to learn proper subordination in the ranks. It's a capital school, Signora, for teaching presumptuous people

to mind their own business and not their neighbours'."

"And you have had the advantage of some years' education in it?" said Giulia, raising her eyebrows with an affected expression of surprise.

"Yes, Signora Giulia; and accordingly I am, I assure you, minding my own business at this moment—and the most pressing and important business to me in all the world!"

"Dear me! I never should have guessed that, if you had not told me so!" retorted Giulia; "but as to the drawing to-day," she added, after a little pause, in a more serious tone, "it was in all earnest and seriousness a matter of great sorrow to me. I would have given much to have saved my cousin from drawing his bad number. It was because I was so vexed," she added, with a manner that seemed to indicate a determination to speak what she felt reluctant to confess, "that I left the hall in such a hurry. And *la Signora Lisa* was kind enough to come with me."

"Excuse me, Signora, I was not aware that you had such a tender interest in Signor Beppo. He is a more fortunate man than I thought him!"

"I said nothing of the kind! I said no word about tender interest," replied Giulia, firing up, and flashing the lightning out upon him.

"Well, of whatever sort the interest is—family interest, perhaps," returned the Corporal, in a more serious tone, "I am sorry for what makes your sorrow, Signora Giulia; and above all had no thought of offending you. But I confess that the Signor Capitano here, and I, as we were looking on the drawing, congratulated one another on the army having got such a soldier. But I thought that there was small chance of our getting Signor Beppo! I fancied that his father was in a position to buy him off. It seems to me a great pity he should not go. He would be sure to rise to be a corporal!"

"I fancied it was pretty certain, Signora Giulia, that your cousin would pay his bad number by proxy," said Captain Brilli; "and I confess I thought it a great pity that the service should lose a man who would make such a fine soldier. That is the sort of men we want, not a lot of poor, rickety scum from the towns."

"I don't know whether Signor Vanni will buy him off, or not," said Giulia; "but I know that he is very unwilling to serve."

“Why should he be? What is his objection to the service?” said Brilli.

“I am sure I don’t know, Signor Capitano; the same, I suppose, that all our *contadini* have. They don’t like being sent out of the country, away from their homes—”

“And their cousins!” said the Corporal.

Giulia tossed her head, and turned her shoulder to him, without deigning any reply to this shot.

“It is a very great pity,” said Captain Brilli, gravely, “that there should be so wide-spread a dislike to the service throughout all this district: and they are just the best men who manifest the most unwillingness to serve their country. It is a very great pity; the more so as the government is fully determined to enforce the law. There has been so much difficulty about it, that it will go hard with those who are contumacious. There seems to be a notion among the people,” continued the Captain, “that they will escape by absenting themselves for a time, a little more or a little less, from their homes, and that all inquiry after them will then blow over. It is a most unfortunate mistake. The men will be brought in and tried as deserters; or, if they should succeed in eluding the pursuit of our fellows, they

must remain bandits and outlaws, under the penalties of felony, all their days. It is quite a mistake to imagine that they will be able to return to their homes after a while."

Captain Brilli said all this as if it was a matter of ordinary conversation. But Giulia could not help thinking that it was intended as a special advertisement to her, for the use and behoof of her cousin. She had no certain knowledge of his intentions in this respect; but she knew the avarice of old Paolo Vanni, and thought it little likely that he would be persuaded to disburse a sum large enough to procure a substitute for Beppo. She knew, also, how strongly Beppo shared the aversion of his countrymen for service in the army. She feared that he might take to the hills, rather than submit to it; and the thought of Beppo a bandit, an outlaw, a felon, who could never any more return to his home without meeting a felon's doom, was very shocking to her.

No doubt the thoughts that rose in her mind, as Captain Brilli was speaking, made themselves legible in her face; and as little that the Corporal, whose eyes were very sure to be employed in that direction, read them there.

Then *la Signora Dossi* came in ; and in a few minutes afterwards *Lisa*.

When she and the Captain were fully engaged in paying exclusive attention to each other, Corporal Tenda made a variety of efforts to induce *Giulia* to come out into the great hall. But they were all in vain. *Giulia* persisted in remaining close to *la Dossi* all the rest of the evening.



CHAPTER IV.

ACROSS COUNTRY.



ALMOST all the habitations that formed the little village of Santa Lucia were grouped together, apparently according to no other plan than such as chance and caprice had dictated, around an irregularly-shaped little piazza, on the lower or valley side of the church. On the other side of it—the side which looked towards the Apennine—were the churchyard, the *Cura*, or parsonage, and a half-ruined tower, the only remains of a small castle that had existed here in the days when the possessors of the soil lived on their land and in strong castles ; the days before social progress turned them from rebels into courtiers. There were the landmarks of the old social arrangements still in their normal places : the lord's castle on the highest, most

prominent, and defensible point of the ground; the dwellings of the peasantry, his serfs and vassals, huddled together on the lower ground at its foot; and the church and the priest between the two.

The old tower was thus the last building of any sort towards the hills. There were, it is true, one or two other villages higher up, before the open ground of the mountain range was reached; and the little bridle-paths which were the only roads above Santa Luce, meandered from one of these to the other in succession. But it was easy for anybody who had a general knowledge of the country, to reach the open hill-side without passing through these. It might have been rather difficult for one having no such knowledge to do so, for the country was broken into a labyrinth of little valleys, each with its small stream, ready to become a scarcely passable torrent after a little rain; and although it appeared easy enough to a wayfarer to steer his course directly for the high tops to the westward and northward of him when he stood at the top of any one of the lower hills, no sooner had he descended into the intervening valley, and plunged among the woods with which most of these valleys are more or less clothed, than

he found himself wholly at a loss as to his direction and bearings. It was a difficult region, in short, for "going across country;" and a stranger under the necessity of traversing it, soon found that his most advisable plan was to bear with the tortuosity of the bridle-paths, and submit to be conducted to each hill-side hamlet in succession. Those to the manner born, however, knew how to reach the upper hills at need by a much more direct and a shorter route.

It was about three o'clock in the morning of a day some five or six days later than the date of the conversation given in the last chapter, that Beppo was standing in the deep shade of the western wall of the old tower above mentioned. The gloom was deepest on that side, and it was the side furthest away from the habitations of the village. . But the precaution, if precaution it was, which had led him to choose that side for his watch, was little needed; for the moon that had lighted him home on his return from Fano after the day of the drawing, had waned; and the night was dark enough on all sides for the purposes of any who had deeds of darkness to do.

And Beppo Vanni, honest Beppo, who had never done anything that all the world might not have

been witness to, for aught he cared—(save and except, indeed, that never-to-be-forgotten deed perpetrated in the moonlight under the half-way cypress!)—frank-eyed, up-looking Beppo, who had never quailed or dropped his glance before the eye of any man, was now to be numbered among those who loved not the light because their deeds were evil.

Evil! In all honesty and truth he did not know it to be such; had every reason, indeed, to believe it to be the reverse. He was acting according to the best of his lights, and according to the counsel of the guide he had been taught to look up to, revere, and obey from his childhood upwards! Nevertheless, the honest, upright, open instincts of the man protested against the enterprise he was engaged in! It was exceedingly painful to him to be sneaking in the dark like a malefactor, fearing to be seen, and starting at every sound. It was not the idea of breaking the law that was shocking to him. The Romagnole peasant, ex-subject of the Papal Government, had small reverence for *law* as such; no idea that honour or morality was in anywise connected with the observance of it. It was the darkness, the skulking, the consciousness that it behoved him to be unseen, not only by the myr-

midons of the law—an honest man's natural enemies, according to Romagnole peasant-philosophy—but by his own comrades and fellows, that oppressed him. And specially it was inexpressibly painful to him to leave Bella Luce under such circumstances. In talking to the priest upon the subject previously he had never realised how it would feel, this sneaking away, and leaving his friends and acquaintance to discover in the morning that he was missing. Now, the step he had taken was so repugnant to him, that he was on the point of returning to the farm-house while it was yet time, and telling the priest in the morning that he had finally determined on accepting service in the army as his lot in life, when the recollection came over him, that it was only by conforming to the priest's counsel that he could obtain the recall of Giulia from the city. To shrink from the course he had embarked in would be to ensure her continuance in the society of that accursed man. The blood rushed to his head and clouded his eyes as the thought shaped itself with maddening distinctness of representation in his mind. No! come what come might to him—let him himself become what he might—*that* should not be. He would save her from that, at all events. It was horrible to think

that even during these days they were together; and he was in a hurry to start at once on his path of exile, as if the performance of his part of the pact would hasten the coming of the moment when she should be snatched out of that man's reach.

There was yet, however, one more thing to be done before Beppo could start on the journey that was to make an outlaw and a bandit of him. He was waiting there behind the old tower, by appointment, for a last meeting with the priest. That active and enterprising intriguer chose to see his man off, and to give him certain instructions for the facilitation of the object in view, when there should be no possibility of his making any confidences at Bella Luce or at Santa Lucia on the subject. It was necessary that these instructions should be precise with regard to certain names of places and persons which were to serve as passwords and means of recognition. For, as may be imagined, Don Evandro was not the man to put anything in writing in such a business.

It has been mentioned that one other Santa Lucia man besides Beppo had drawn a number which condemned him to serve. But Don Evandro did not intend that any parishioner of his

should swell the ranks of the excommunicate army. He had taken due care that this companion in Beppo's misfortune should also be found wanting when the day of the examination came. But he had avoided saying anything to Beppo on this subject. The man in question was of a different class, and of a very different character from Beppo; and it appeared to his reverence that the two cases had better be treated separately. It would not be likely by any means to commend the course of action in question to Beppo, to find that he was to be associated in it with his fellow parishioner; and besides, there were certain means of facilitation and provisions for the well-being of Beppo Vanni to be made, which the priest either did not care, or would not venture, to put in action in the case of a less valuable and reliable member of his flock. So Beppo, knowing nothing of the fate or intentions of his brother conscript, was to start alone.

The priest did not keep him waiting long. Three o'clock had been the hour named. Beppo, in his nervousness, had been at the trysting-place a few minutes before the time; yet, in coming up from Bella Luce, he had tarried awhile under the half-way cypress! The little bell in the church

tower had not yet struck the quarter, when Beppo heard a footstep on the other side of the tower, and Don Evandro made his appearance.

"So you are here before me, *figliuolo mio*!" he said, scarcely above a whisper, though in truth there were no ears anywhere within hearing; "I am glad to see you so punctual; it is a good sign. Now give me your best attention, for it is very important that you should recollect the directions I am going to give you. In the first place, have you brought any food with you?"

"Yes, your reverence! I remembered what you told me. I have bread enough to last me through to-day, and a bit of *salame*" (a sort of sausage much used by the peasantry).

"That is all right! Because, observe, it will be well for you not to enter any village or house in the course of this day. You are sufficiently known in all this district to run the chance at least of being recognised. Not that there would be much fear of any harm from any of the people of our hills. Thank God, they are little likely to feel anything but sympathy for a fellow-subject of our Holy Father escaping from the clutches of the infidel Government. But there is no telling whom you might fall in with. There are all sorts of

spies and evil-disposed persons about the country ; and it is very desirable that no information of the route you have taken should reach the ears of the authorities. Therefore, keep at a distance from all habitations whatsoever during this first day. And for the first night—mark me !—make, in the first instance, as directly as you can consistently with avoiding all villages and houses, for Monte Conserva. Then, bearing southward, cross the river at Volpone, under Sant' Andrea, and make for Monte Arcello ; and thence go down till you are near the village of Aqualagna. You know Aqualagna ?”

“ Yes, your reverence ; I have often been at Aqualagna ; but I have been by the road through the Furlo.”

“ Exactly so. That would be the usual way to go there, and much shorter than the route I have traced for you. But it is very desirable that you should put yourself on the other side of the Furlo, but should not pass through it ;—you understand ?”

The Furlo, it must be explained, is a very remarkable passage bored through the living rock by the Romans, by means of which the high road of communication between Umbria, Perugia, and Rome, and all the region to the south-west of the

Apennines on the one side, and Romagna and the cities of the Adriatic on the other, is enabled to thread the valley of the Cardigliano torrent, instead of climbing the mountains, as it must have done if these great road-makers—the ancient masters of the world—had not opened this extraordinary passage. The Furlo is situated between the towns of Fossombrone and Cagli, a little to the north of the village of Aqualagna.

“Do not attempt to pass by the road through the Furlo,” continued the priest; “either now or on any future occasion while you may be out; for that is the spot where the road will be watched, and where any parties of soldiers who may be scouring the country will be sure to pass. Remember to avoid it. By placing it between you and this part of the country without ever passing through it, you will throw all pursuit off the scent more surely than in any other way. The track across the mountains which I have indicated to you is a long journey—a very long journey, for one day; but not more than such a pair of legs as yours can do: on the following day you may take it more easily. Now, observe just outside the village of Aqualagna, as you go on to the little bridge over the stream that runs into the river

opposite Santa Lucia, you will see a Franciscan friar sitting by the road-side. He will get up as you come up to him, and you will say, instead of 'Good evening, *frate!*' 'Good *morning*, *frate!*' Do not say anything else. He will then walk on, and you must follow him till he comes to the door of a little oratory of our Blessed Lady on the other side of the village. He will just give a tap with his stick in passing, and walk on. Then you must go in at the door he struck. You will find clean straw, and food, and wine. Nobody will come near you. Eat, drink, and sleep; and start on your way before daylight in the morning, closing the door after you. The next day" continued the priest, "take your way up the stream of the Cardigliano, towards the little town of Piobico. When you have cleared the village of Aqualagna and the high road, you need not be so much afraid of the villages and the houses. Make your way up the river as far as Piobico. There another stream falls into the Cardigliano, called the Biscuglio. Follow that for a little way from the town, till it brings you to a small priory, called Santa Maria di Valle d' Abisso. It is a very lonely spot, among thick woods, hidden in the deep folds of a very high mountain to the south of it, called

Monte Nerone. There you will find five or six poor friars of the order of Miamis. Say to one of them you may first fall in with, '*Bella Luce di Santa Lucia*,' and you will be received with such hospitality as they have to give you. There you would be little likely to be found, however long you remain there. But if there should be any danger of a visit to the monastery, the friars will not fail to hear of it beforehand, and there are the means of baffling a whole regiment of soldiers close at hand. First of all, there is the wilderness and woods of Monte Nerone close behind and overhanging the monastery. Then, higher up the mountain, by the side of a little stream that comes straight down from the heights of Monte Nerone, there are some ruins of an old castle—much more than this old tower here; and there are vaults beneath, which the friar will show you at need, and which neither you nor anybody else would ever find without being shown. Have you paid good attention to what I have been saying?"

"Yes, your reverence."

And you think you will be able to remember the directions I have given you?"

"I think so, your reverence. I shall not forget."

"What are you to say to the *frate* to-night?"

"Good morning, frate!"

"All right! and what to the friars at Santa Maria di Valle d' Abisso?"

"Bella Luce di Santa Lucia! Oh! I shall not forget *that*, your reverence!" said Beppo, with a deep sigh.

"Well, then, that's all that there is to be said, I think; and the sooner you are on your way the better. And mind what I said about the Furlo pass! Don't be tempted to shorten your way by going through that on any occasion. Farewell, my son!" concluded the priest, giving him his benediction with a flourish of fingers *secundum artem*.

"But, please your reverence, how am I to do about getting news from home?" asked Beppo, rather dismayed at the evident intention of the priest to drop this part of the subject altogether. "You know your reverence said that there would be ways of sending word home and getting news from home."

"Of course—of course! I suppose it is the last of the two that is most in your mind, eh? But that must be left to me. I shall take care that tidings shall reach you. They will come to you through those holy fathers who are going to give you hospitality. Do not attempt to make any

inquiry except of them. Tidings shall reach you, never fear."

"And your reverence has fixed the day for poor Giulia's return to Bella Luce?" said poor Beppo, timidly, yet anxiously.

"On Sunday evening she will be at home in the farm-house at Bella Luce."

"And perhaps your reverence would please to let me hear whether—whether—whether her conduct is becoming and such as satisfies your reverence?"

"Yes, yes! You shall have all the budget of home news."

"And your reverence will be sure to let me know as soon as I may come home?" said poor Beppo, innocently.

"Of course—of course! But you must not be in a hurry. Be content with the safe asylum provided for you. There will be hundreds of lads in the mountains, to get away from this accursed tyranny; but I doubt if there will be one among them whose safety and comfort have been cared for and provided for them as yours have been."

And this part of the priest's statement at least was true enough.

"I am not ungrateful to your reverence, indeed !
Good-bye, your reverence !"

"Once again, God bless you, my son ! May
good fortune go with you !"

And so poor Beppo turned his face to the westward mountains, which had become just visible in the cold grey light of the coming dawn during the last minutes of his conversation with the priest ; and the latter returned to the "Cura," to make *la Nunziata* believe that he was just up.



CHAPTER V.

SANTA MARIA DELLA VALLE D'ABISSO.

BEPPO started on his way with a brave spirit and a stout and alert step, but with a heavy heart. The experiences which were gathering around him were all so new and so strange. The future, though he little guessed, poor fellow! all the consequences that were involved in the step he was taking, was so dim and so vague. The sense of the adventurous and romantic, which to a certain degree would have gilded the unknown future to the imagination of many a northern youth of Beppo's years, had no charm for the Romagnole peasant—spoke nothing to his imagination. The peasantry of these hills is a specially and essentially home-loving population; in no wise given to adventure, or the spirit which loves to seek excitement in

the search for "fresh fields and pastures new." It was grievous to him to leave Bella Luce; grievous to be absent from the habitual rustic tasks which he pictured to himself as going on in their wonted round there; more grievous still, to be leaving the home of his childhood, like a thief in the night, with precautions against being seen or traced by any one of those who had been his familiar life-long friends; most grievous of all, to be leaving his home just as Giulia was returning to it, and returning under such circumstances.

But the die was cast; and there was nothing for it but to step boldly onwards.

The top of Monte Conserva was conspicuous in front of him; and the earliest rays of the sun, rising from the Adriatic behind him, were beginning to touch its hoary brow with a pale flickering glory. But all immediately around him was still in darkness. The little stone-paved bridle-way, broken in parts and unmended since more years than the oldest inhabitant of those hills could remember, led to the village of Sant' Andrea in Vado, at the bottom of a close little valley behind Santa Lucia. There was a ford over the brawling little stream that ran down the valley, carrying

its small tribute to the Metauro with more noise than it was worth, and stepping-stones, for foot-passengers to the village. But Beppo, bearing the priest's recommendations in mind, and knowing a spot higher up the stream where he could jump it at a place where it ran between two great stones, soon left the paved path, and striking into a coppice, and then across a region of upland sheep-walks, left the village to the southward, and still kept the mountain-top, for which he was striving, right in front of him.

It seemed to be at no great distance from him. But many another hidden valley, nestling in the folds of the hills, and further concealed, most of them, by the rich abundance of timber, revealed itself, each deceptively promising to be the last, before the real ascent of Monte Conserva was reached.

Notwithstanding his precaution and his intimate knowledge of the country, it would have been difficult for Beppo to have avoided meeting some villager going a-field if he had traversed the earlier part of his route at a later hour. But by the time that the sun had risen sufficiently high to illuminate the valleys, and call up the *contadini* to their labour, he had reached a high ridge

of sterile and uninhabited country, which forms the boundary of the great valley of the Metauro and the watershed of the streamlets which run into it from the north. The valley was far below him on his left hand, and he was leaving the town of Fossombrone, situated in its bottom, behind him. To his right and in front of him were the forest-covered heights of Santa Maria delle Selve—Our Lady of the Woods. It was nearly ten o'clock, and he had been walking almost six hours, when he reached the high end of the ridge along which he had been travelling, called Monte Conserva. There he sat down to rest himself under the shady wall of a little deserted oratory, called S. Maria del Monte, close to which a tiny rill trickled out of the hill-side, and supplied him with the means of washing down his breakfast of very dry bread and *salame*.

From that point he was to turn southwards, descend into the valley, and cross the Metauro by the bridge of Volpone. It was thus necessary for him to pass through a cultivated and comparatively thickly inhabited zone of lowlands before again striking into the hills on the other side of the Metauro. He had already, however, reached a distance from Bella Luce which made the chances

of his being recognised by any one he might happen to meet very small; and in order, according to the priest's recommendations, to reduce them to a minimum, he determined to rest under the wall of S. Maria del Monte long enough, so to time his walk across the valley as to make it coincide with the hours of repose from noon till two. At that time of the year, and that hour, the chances were that he might pass the valley and the bridge without seeing a human being.

The hills on either side press more closely upon the stream at the point selected for Beppo's crossing it, than either above or below that spot. The valley is very narrow there, and by two o'clock he had once more reached a roadless district of very sparsely inhabited hills on the southern side of the Metauro, without having encountered a single soul. The high mass of Monte Arcello was now in his front, and due south; and the celebrated Pass of the Furlo was running nearly parallel to his course some six or seven miles on his left hand.

The sun was already beginning to dip behind the higher ridges of the main chain of the Apennines to the westward by the time Monte Arcello was reached, and Beppo found that such a day's

journey as he had made over a never-ending succession of hills and valleys was much harder work than pruning vines all day. He had not much further to go, however, to reach Aqualagna, the village on the high road where he was to fall in with the promised friar. Aqualagna might have been reached from Santa Lucia by descending at once into the valley of the Metauro, and following it through the town of Fossombrone, and thence by the Furlo Pass, in little more than half the distance, and with less than half the labour it had cost Beppo to reach it. But if he had followed that route he might have been seen and marked by a hundred different people. At Fossombrone, at all events, he would have been sure to have left a very easily found trace of his passage. Whereas, by the way he had taken, making a sudden angle, and changing his course from westwards to southwards at Monte Conserva, he had travelled all the way without one encounter.

It was late—much after the hour at which the labouring population mostly go to their beds—when he approached Aqualagna, so much so, that he feared he should lose the shelter and supper that had been promised him for that night, in consequence of the friar, whom he was to find on

the bridge, having given him up. It was not so, however. As he neared the little bridge, there, sitting on a stone by the end of the parapet wall, was the motionless figure of a Franciscan friar, with one of those huge white felt hats worn when travelling by some one or other of the numerous branches and families into which the great order is divided. The figure rose as Beppo came up, and instantly, on being addressed by him with the strange salutation, "Good *morning*, brother!" moved on without reply, and preceded him into the village. They passed through the now silent and solitary village street, and all fell out according to the prediction of Don Evandro, with the exactitude and precision of the fulfilment of the enchantments of a fairy tale. The silent friar proceeded through the village and out into the fields at the other end of it, passed in front of a small chapel or oratory—the miniature little dwelling attached to which seemed, as far as any outward and visible sign went, to be uninhabited—just struck the door of the chapel with his staff as he passed it, and walked on, without ever turning round to look at the result of his performance. It must be supposed that looking round had not made part of his instructions.

Beppo pushed the door, and found that it was open. There was abundance of clean straw on the brick-paved floor; and there, on the little wooden dais at the foot of the altar, were a flask of wine, some bread, and some slices of ham. And none of the various troubles, and sorrows, and anxieties, which were pressing on Beppo's mind, prevented him from making a very hearty supper, and enjoying immediately after it the "*Somnus agrestium lenis virorum*," which disdained the little chapel of the Madonna as little as the shady bank or Tempe itself.

The road which, coming from the north-east through the Furlo Pass, has followed as far as Aqualagna the course of the Cardigliano, quits it at that point to avail itself of the valley of another stream, called the Burano, which, coming from the southwards, falls into the Cardigliano at that point; while the latter river, making a right angle, goes off to the westward,—in the direction, that is to say, of the main chain of the Apennine. This was the route which it had been prescribed to Beppo to follow; and it led him, when after a good night's rest in his sacred dormitory he began his second day's journey, into a very secluded, though not altogether unin-

habited, district. There was no road up the narrow valley, and only in some parts a bridle-path. And the character of the country became rougher and wilder as the valley approached the upper hills.

The little town of Piobico, which communicates with the rest of the world by no road whatever, is situated at the foot of the huge mass of Monte Nerone, to the south of it, and at the junction of the Cardigliano and Biscuglio rivers.

Another smaller and nameless stream comes down from Monte Nerone among thick forests, so pathless as to suggest strange ideas of the domestic life of the inhabitants of the dwelling, of which, as Don Evandro said, the ruins are still visible by the side of the stream. There are large vaults also beneath them, as the priest had likewise said. Let us hope that they were not used for any other purpose save the storing of the châtelain's wine. But if such were the case, they certainly made good cheer in the depth of the forest and mountain solitude, for the cellarage is very abundant. It may be supposed, perhaps, that the friars of the neighbouring monastery—more numerous, doubtless, in those days, than the half-dozen or so of poor recluses who still inhabit the lonely

spot (if, as is very probable, they have not yet been turned out from their obscure home)—came up to the castle to help to drink the lord's wine.

But it is of the lives led by the wives and daughters of those old châtelains, that the contemplation of their abode suggests the most striking picture. Did they ever get away any more, when they had once been brought across torrents, and through forests, and over mountains, to their lord's castle? Did they ever want, and if they ever did want, did they ever get a doctor? Did they keep any maid-servants? Were they very particular in bolting the doors when their husbands were away from home? Were the friars from the neighbouring monastery allowed to come and visit them at such times? What on earth did they do from morning till night? Here, at all events, they lived, and here they died; and here assuredly they must have been buried; though there is no trace of grave or monument to be seen. But here they live no more! What caused "his lordship's establishment to be broken up?" Somebody must have been the last man who ever slept in the lonely dwelling! What became of that last man's

bedding? Did he lock the door, and mean to come back again, when he went away for the last time? Or did battle, murder, and sudden death, with fire in their train, come suddenly upon the dwelling and its inhabitants some night, and leave thenceforth only a ruin behind them?

The ecclesiastical establishment, which shared those remote solitudes with the lay lord's castle, has been longer lived than it, and its inmates have been more constant to it! The little monastery is not close to the ruins of the castle. They are a mile or two apart. The castle stood further up the hill, and is more completely surrounded—or at least its ruins are more completely surrounded—by the forest. The monastery stands on the border of the stream: it is impossible to conceive a more lugubrious-looking spot. It perfectly well fulfils the idea suggested by its strangely significant name,—“Our Lady of the Valley of the Abyss!”

A shifting of the bed of the little stream, at some period before either castles or monasteries had come into the world, has left a small, flat, dank-looking, semicircular meadow, at the spot where it circles round the base of the hill in a rapid curve.

The very green and very shady, but very damp-looking plot of ground thus situated, is shut in by the almost perpendicular side of the forest-covered mountain which surrounds it in a semicircle. The chord of this arc is formed by the stream, which at either end of the curved space thus enclosed passes so close under the precipitous banks above it, as to cut off the little meadow from all approach save by crossing the stream.

In that remarkably situated spot, some sainted disciple of St. Francis, not having any fear of rheumatism before his eyes, planted a monastery. It is a very small and poor one, and the few inmates look, or probably looked (for, as I said, they have most likely been turned out of the Valley of the Abyss by this time), meagre and poor. There were no fat ones among them. They were all of the lean, gaunt category of monks. The cords which girded the folds of their brown serge frocks around their loins, seemed as though they gathered together superfluously abundant drapery around the forms of skeletons. The buildings are poor looking, but solid enough, and far more than sufficient in extent for all the purposes of the diminished family which inhabited them. There they still lingered, in the solitary,

remote, damp, unwholesome spot: still tinkling their bells in the solitude every day for five hundred years; still saying their masses and singing their litanies as they said and sung them five hundred years ago; still burying their dead in the extra-miserable looking spot between the back of the chapel and the rock of the mountain side!

Beppo succeeded, after some little trouble, in finding his way about night-fall to the little valley in which the monastery of Santa Maria della Valle d'Abisso is situated. He might have been puzzled, however, to find any means of crossing the stream to get to the building save wading through it, had he not chanced to overtake one of the brotherhood, who had been out on one of the begging expeditions, by means of which the mendicants of St. Francis chiefly support themselves at the expense of the labouring population of the surrounding districts, slowly wending his way homeward to the drone-hive. He was labouring heavily along the rough and broken little foot-path, which found its way among the trees and rocks on the opposite side of the river to that on which the monastery stands, laden with a full sack, which hung down his bent back over his left

shoulder, and with a small keg suspended under the arm at his right side.

"Good evening, *frate*," said Beppo, coming up with him ; "is it far to Santa Maria della Valle d'Abisso ?"

"I hope not, *Signor mio*," said the friar, looking at him with some surprise, "for I have carried my load a long way, and am tired."

"You are going to Santa Maria, then, I suppose ?" returned Beppo.

"Why, it is hardly likely that anybody should be travelling along this path, if they were not going there ; for it leads nowhere else, that I know of."

"Then you may guess that I am going there, too," said Beppo.

"So I suppose ; though we see a stranger rarely enough to make me suppose anything else, if there was anything else possible," returned the friar.

"Well, that is where I am bound for ; so I may think myself in luck to have fallen in with somebody to show me the way."

"There are not so many paths as to make much danger of taking the wrong one, and not so many habitations in the valley as to make it easy to

mistake the monastery," observed the friar, with no great degree of cordiality ; for the appearance of a stranger there at such an hour seemed to presage a demand on the hospitality of the convent, which, to the mind of the poor begging brother, did not appear to be compensated by the break in the monotony of convent life which the presence of the guest might occasion.

"No ; there is no great choice of roads, it is true," rejoined Beppo ; "but I am a stranger in these parts, and did not know whereabouts the monastery might be, exactly."

"I suppose so !" replied the mendicant. "May I ask your purpose in seeking Santa Maria della Valle d'Abisso ? We don't see many visitors here."

"I have a message to the superior," replied Beppo, after a few moments' reflection.

"A message for the superior !" re-echoed the friar, stopping to rest his sack on a large boulder stone by the side of the path, while he examined the stranger with more curiosity.

"May I ask who sends it, Signore ?" said he, staring at the *contadino* from head to foot.

"Perhaps I had better wait till I can tell my message at the monastery," replied Beppo, after another pause for consideration.

"As you please, but we have no secrets in our house. There are not enough of us for that—by the blessing of Our Lady; for I don't know how we should keep body and soul together if there were any more of us!"

"Oh, I have no secrets from any of the brethren," said Beppo; "only, if you have been absent long from the house you might not know—"

"I came away four days ago," returned the friar, still rather sulkily; "and it's many a long mile I have been to gather what there is in this sack! —many a long mile, and I shall not be sorry to get home."

"Four days!" said Beppo, thoughtfully to himself.

"Yes, four days!" repeated the friar, staring at him with more surprise than before.

"Did you ever hear of Bella Luce di Santa Lucia, *frate*?" said Beppo.

"Oh—h—h—h!" exclaimed the friar, slowly lifting his chin, till it brought the huge rim of his white felt hat into a vertical position at the back of his head, "that's it, is it? You are all right, friend! Yes, I have heard of Bella Luce di Santa Lucia. Welcome to Santa Maria—though we are

not quite there yet. Come on, Signore. Perhaps your worship would lend me a hand to hoist the sack. It is getting late, and it is time we were indoors."

All this was said with an entirely changed tone, which made it evident to Beppo that his introduction was a potent one, and gave promise of a better welcome than the friar's manner had at first suggested.

So Beppo and his new companion trudged on, one after the other—the path was too narrow to admit of their walking side by side—the friar having declined the stranger's offer to carry his keg for him, till they came in sight of the blackish-gray-looking stone buildings of the monastery on the opposite side of the stream.

"How are we to get across?" said Beppo, when he saw that the bridgeless river was between them and their destination.

"You shall see," said the friar, putting down his sack, and drawing a small whistle from the pocket of his frock. He blew a shrill whistle on it, and sat down by the side of his sack to await the result.

In a few minutes Beppo perceived, with some difficulty in the imperfect light, a figure on the

opposite bank pushing out a punt from behind a low wall, built apparently on the brink of the stream. By the time the punt reached the centre of the stream he could see that it was another of the brethren who was standing in it, and managing with considerable dexterity the task of pushing it across, which the rapidity of the stream rendered a not altogether easy operation. The shaven navigator, however, brought his craft with the nicest exactitude to the spot where his two expectant passengers were standing, and, tossing the end of a chain to his brother on the bank, stepped ashore without speaking, while the latter dropped the ring at the end of the chain over a stake in the bank prepared to receive it, and the punt swung round to the current.

"Bella Luce di Santa Lucia," said the monk who was returning home from his begging circuit, in reply to the questioning look which the other was staring at Beppo.

"Oh—h—h!" said the second monk, just in the tone with which the first had received the same intimation. "We are prepared to receive you, Signore," he said, addressing the stranger, "and to give you such hospitality as we have to offer, which

the Holy Virgin knows is little enough ! Be pleased to step into the boat. But if it is very little else in any other way that we have to give you," he added, as, having pushed the boat back across the stream, and moored it in its little hidden harbour, he stepped on to the shore of the damp green meadow that constituted the territory of the monastery, "I think I can promise you that no heretic soldiers will come to look for you here, or would find you if they did. And now, my son," he continued, as the other monk once again shouldered his sack, and they all three stepped across the meadow to a low door almost close under the overhanging precipice which shut in the building, and rendered all other "*clausura*" unnecessary to the strictest monastic rule, on that side at all events, "Now, my son, I will show you where you may find at least rest and safety ; and we will see what we can do to find you where-withal to satisfy your hunger. There was some good ham in the little oratory at Aqualagna last night, I know ; but we have none such to give you here."

And Beppo perceived that the dexterous carman was no other than the superior of the small community.

So there he was, a guest and inmate of the monastery of Santa Maria della Valle d' Abisso, and a refugee from the pursuit of the laws of his country.



CHAPTER VI.

THE CORPORAL SURRENDERS AT DISCRETION.

WHEN the communication from old Paolo Vanni—to the effect that he wished Giulia to return to Bella Luce, and that he purposed coming to Fano to fetch her home on the following Sunday—reached Signor Sandro, it caused him considerable surprise. And when *la Dossi* and Giulia herself were told of it, it was a matter of very considerable sorrow to the former, and of unbounded astonishment to the latter.

Giulia tormented her brain to imagine what could be the motive for this new dispensation, and could find but one. It must be that Beppo had so completely succeeded in convincing his father and Don Evandro that he had altogether given her up, that they had felt that there was no longer any object to be gained by depriving

la Sunta of her assistance in the house and the produce of her spinning. That seemed, upon the whole, perhaps, to be the most probable explanation. And the thought that it must be so caused her many a sleepless hour of tears and wretchedness. It was of no use to tell herself, again and again, that she had never had any hope that her love for her cousin could be otherwise than an unhappy one—a source of life-long pain and sorrow; no use to reflect that she had given Beppo no hope, as far as any remotest chance of ever becoming his wife went. Her heart had never given him up! No use to represent to herself the cruelty and selfishness of desiring even that Beppo's life should be blighted by an unhappy love, rather than that he should be free—free in heart, to form some happier tie! Her intelligence had nothing to say in answer to these considerations, but her heart would not accept them, much less be comforted by them. Beppo loved her no more; and he had ceased to love her because he believed her to be false and worthless! Oh! if it were but possible to make him read her inmost heart—every thought, every feeling of it—and then die, it would make all well! Then there need be no more sorrow, no more trouble!

And she would lie on her death-bed, oh! so willingly, so happily, on those terms! But that he should cast her off from his heart, as being—all that he thought her; that it should have come to that; that it signified no longer whether she were near him or not, because he was so thoroughly convinced of her unworthiness; oh! it was very, very bitter, very cruelly hard!

And how, at home, should she endure to live in the house with him, seeing him daily, meeting him at least twice a day, at the daily dinner and the daily supper, under such circumstances? How was she to bear the lot that was laid on her?

Could it be that old Signor Vanni absolutely was too avaricious to pay for a substitute, and intended that Beppo should serve in the ranks of the army; and that her return had been resolved on, because he would be absent from Bella Luce? It seemed impossible to suppose this, bearing in mind the horror all his class had for the service. If only she could believe that her recall was grounded on such a motive, painful as it would be to think of Beppo's condemnation to a fate he so much hated, it would be an immeasurable relief to her. As far as the mere being at Bella

Luce instead of at Fano was concerned, the change would be a welcome one to her. For since she had become aware of the necessity of behaving with a more guarded discretion in her manner generally, and specially towards Corporal Tenda, her position in *la Dossi's* house was becoming a difficult one to her. And the more she tried to keep the Corporal at a distance, the more pressing and the more serious became his assiduities. Yes, as far as the mere change of residence went, she should be well pleased enough to go back to Bella Luce.

"It is very vexatious!" said *la Signora Dossi*, one evening as she and her handmaiden sat at their little bit of supper in the kitchen together; "very! I shall never get anybody, and I never had anybody with me, that I liked half as well as I do you, Giulia dear!"

"I shall be sorry to leave you, signora. As far as you are concerned, you have always been very kind to me—much more than I deserve." And Giulia's lip began to twitch and quiver a little, as the thought of her undeservingness and the consequences of it came into her mind.

"Where ever am I to find a girl that can pull me up out of my chair in the way you do? Lord

bless you ! it would take a team of these town girls to do it, and then would need a teamster to make 'em pull together !" said *la Dossi*, chuckling at the picture her lamentations had suggested to her fancy.

"What do they want you at home for, I wonder?" continued *la Dossi*, grumblingly. "Had you any idea they were going to have you back again?"

"No, indeed, signora. I am as much surprised as anybody can be," said *Giulia*, colouring painfully.

"Just as you had learned to roast a bird to a turn, too! It is too provoking. An apoplexy take Farmer Vanni! '*Ave Maria, gratia plena, Dominus tay-coom!*' It is enough to make a saint swear!"

"It is very hard on you, signora, when you have taken so much pains to teach me," said *Giulia*, who felt that *la Dossi* really was rather hardly used in the matter.

"Ah! it was a pleasure to teach you. But when shall I get another to learn as you have learnt? And in another week I'd back you against any cook in Fano for an omelette! Ah, well! we all have our crosses in this world, and

I suppose they are sent for our good," said *la Dossi*, as she thought with a sigh, half of penitence, half of sinfully complacent recollection, of certain trespasses scored up against her under the rubric "*gola*," which *Giulia's* proficiency had caused her to incur.

And then the *habitués* of the house had to be told that *la Giulia* was going back to her home in the hills. And everybody professed their regret, and condoled with *la Dossi* on her loss, and said civil things. But the news seemed to fall on the Corporal like a thunderbolt. He turned pale, and absolutely became taciturn and thoughtful during the remainder of his Captain's visit.

When they were going away, and *Giulia* was lighting them across the great hall, just as she had opened the door, and Captain *Brilli* had passed through it first, as was right and proper, "*Signor Capitano*," said the Corporal suddenly, "will you go on, and kindly wait for me at the bottom of the stairs a minute or two? I want to say a word to *la Signorina Giulia*."

Then *Giulia*, remembering what *Lisa* had said to her, knew what was coming, and felt that she had a disagreeable five minutes to pass.

"Signora Giulia," said the Corporal, with a little bow of excuse, as he gently took the open door from her hand and closed it, speaking at the same time in a tone totally unlike his usual light-hearted and laughing manner, but without the slightest hesitation or trepidation,—*"Signora Giulia, this sudden news of your return home has taken me quite by surprise, and makes it necessary for me to take the present opportunity, though it is a somewhat too hurried one perhaps, to say a few words to you. May I hope for your kind attention?"*

Giulia, though she thought she knew very well the upshot of what the Corporal was going to say to her, was quite unprepared for this calm and business-like way of setting about the matter,—so different from all her former experiences in the same line,—so different from Beppo's half-passionate, half-timid, blush-compelling ways.

"Certainly, Signor Caporale! Of course I will listen to anything you wish to say. But I can't think what you can have to speak to me about."

(I wonder whether Eve told pretty lies to Adam. I suppose she did, as naturally as the first ducks took to the water!)

"I had hoped, Signora Giulia, that you might have guessed the subject on which I wished to speak with you," said the little Corporal, still quite self-possessed; for he considered all this little skirmishing quite as much *en règle* as the due opening of trenches *secundum artem* before a place to be besieged.

"Is it anything I can do for you up at Bella Luce?" said Giulia, dropping her eyes; "I shall be very happy——"

"Nothing of that sort, signora. I am much obliged to you, all the same," said the Corporal. "Signora Giulia, you see before you a man whose inmost citadel you have taken by storm!"

"I, Signor Caporale!" said Giulia, genuinely ignorant of his meaning this time, not having been ever trained to the use of metaphors, and comprehending in affairs of the heart only the simplest language of the heart. "I, Signor Caporale!" she said, much puzzled to conceive what species of misconduct it was that he was charging her with—"I have taken nothing by storm!"

"Pardon me, lovely Giulia, you have taken my heart by storm! The garrison has nothing to do

but march out, and beg for honourable terms of capitulation."

"Really, Corporal Tenda, I don't know anything about the ways of garrisons; I never was in a garrison town till lately, you know," said Giulia, really much puzzled to guess whether she was to understand that he was making her an offer of marriage or not. He spoke of his "heart," and something about "honourable terms," which looked like it: but then, what had garrisons and marching to do with it? Besides, his manner was not like a man making love. Beppo would have done—— various things that she was very much relieved by the Corporal's making no attempt to do.

"Bella Giulia," returned the Corporal, finding it necessary to be more explicit, "I throw myself at your feet! There is no use in soiling my regimentals on the pavement, but you will understand that my intention is to throw myself at your feet, and offer you my heart and hand,—the heart of, I trust, an honest and loving man, and the hand of a corporal in his Majesty's service. I am in love with your beauty, I admire your goodness, I respect your character. I am heir to an old uncle, who possesses a snug little farm,—

freehold land, and most of it pasture,—at Cuneo, in the province of Turin. I refer you to my officers for my character. I ask you to make the happiness of my life, by consenting to be my wife !”

This time there was no mistaking the meaning of what was said to her ; but Giulia found it difficult to be equally explicit in reply. So she shook her head, and began tracing devices with her toe on the pavement.

“Signora Giulia,” said the Corporal, who still hoped that these symptoms were but the results of rustic coyness, “silence is held to give consent.”

“Oh, no ! indeed it does not !” said Giulia, frightened into speaking,—“indeed it does not ! I am so sorry—so very sorry, Signor Caporale ; but silence gives refusal in this case. Indeed, indeed, I cannot be your wife !”

“*Gentilissima* Signora Giulia, I am profoundly penetrated with the conviction that I do not appear before you, in my present position, in the light of one who is justified in asking your hand. Circumstances, and, I may fairly say, the urgent need of our country for the service of all its sons capable of bearing arms in the field, have made

me what you see me, a poor corporal of Bersaglieri. The position, though a poor, is an honourable one; but it is not, I am aware, such as your husband ought to occupy. But I beg you, Signora Giulia, before deciding on declining my offer, to give your attention to two points. The first is, that my present position may be considered a provisional one only; as it would be my hope to retire, on the death of my uncle—seventy-nine last birth-day, and alarmingly threatened with gout in the stomach—to my ancestral fields,—freehold, and mostly, indeed nearly entirely, rich pasture land; and the position of my wife, as mistress of the farm of Monteverde, would not, perhaps, be unworthy of your acceptance. The second point which I would submit to you is, that in accepting the hand of a man who has served, even as a non-commissioned officer, you have a guarantee for character, and I offer the most satisfactory references,—which could hardly be found to the same extent in the case of a civilian.”

The Corporal had delivered this oration with considerable rhetorical ornament and much appropriate gesticulation; and at its conclusion he awaited her reply, standing with his body a little

bent forwards, his feet in the third position, and his open hands extended a little in front of him.

"I am sure, Signor Caporale," replied Giulia, by no means insensible to the magnificence of the offer made her, or altogether untouched by the disinterested admiration and affection of the worthy little man, "I am sure that there are more reasons than enough to make any girl glad enough to marry you, if—if—if it was any way possible. But as for me, I assure you that—that—that it is *not* any way possible."

"And why is it not possible, *stigmatissima* Signora Giulia? If the proposal appears to you a not unacceptable one, wherefore is it not possible? Am I so unfortunate as to find your heart already engaged?"

Giulia did not, in reply to this very direct question, tell him that that was a question which no man had a right to ask—that it was unfairly putting her in a position which, &c., &c.,—for she had never been instructed in the delicate proprieties of the situation; and the fact was, that the Corporal's question appeared to her a perfectly *natura* and proper one. None the less, however, did she find it a very embarrassing one to answer.

"Why, Signor Caporale," she said, blushing, and

speaking as if she was on the point of bursting into tears, "is there no reason why it may not be possible for a poor girl to accept such a generous offer as yours, except that she is engaged to some one else?"

It was a weak attempt at evasion, and Giulia knew that it was so. And when the Corporal brushed away her little card bastion of sophistical defence by saying categorically,

"No reason whatever, lovely Giulia, except that her *heart* is engaged to some one else. If *that* is the case, I must accept my misfortune, and bear it as well as I can. If not, I still hope. *Is that the case?*"

"It would not have been the case," said poor Giulia, crimson all over, and turning her face away from her interrogator with the feeling that she certainly *was* very much to blame in the matter, and owed it to the Corporal to soften her rejection of him as much as possible,—*"it would not have been the case,"* she said, apologetically, "if it had not been that I knew him so many years first!"

"Ha! Cousin Beppo!" cried the Corporal, clasping his hands and dropping his head upon his breast; "the Captain was right! Signora

Giulia, *il* Signor Capitano Brilli warned me that your heart was already engaged to your cousin. Still he was wrong—it is something to know that he was wrong—in considering that his excess of stature must necessarily cause him to be preferred to me. If I had come first I should have had the prize. Being first is everything in this life. I should have had my promotion for being first inside the enemy's works on the heights of San Martino, if another fellow had not run faster than I. Signora Giulia," he continued, bringing himself with a sudden start into the attitude of military salutation, "Signora Giulia, farewell! Had I come first, I could have loved you well. Your memory will be ever sacred to me, in future years, when I shall have retired to my little (freehold) farm of Monteverde. God bless you, and send you all happiness! *Addio*, signora!"

"*Addio*, Signor Caporale, *addio*! I am grateful for all your kindness to me," said poor Giulia, who longed to put herself on the same level of unhappiness with him, by explaining that she was fully as unhappy in her love as he was in his, but did not know how to set about it.

"And, Signora Giulia," said the Corporal, from the landing-place, putting his head back through

the half-opened door, "pray understand yourself, and make the happy and fortunate Signor Beppo understand, that I should not have spoken as I did when I had the advantage of seeing him here the other day, had I been aware that he was honoured by your love. Tell him I congratulate him, and wish him all happiness with all my heart, and bid him bear no malice. Once more, Signora Giulia, God bless you!"

"It was true, then," was Giulia's first reflection when the door was closed behind the Corporal, and she was left in the great hall by herself, "it was true, then, that the Corporal was making love to me all this time in serious earnest! I wish, oh! how I wish that people carried their hearts outside, so that everybody might see all about it. Ah! Beppo would know then——" and therewith her mind went back from the Corporal's sorrows to dwell upon her own.

It was not long, however, before all those in Fano who were interested in the matter of Giulia's recall home, and who had been surprised at it, were enlightened respecting the causes which had led to it.

Although the young men liable to be drawn by the conscription are not bound even to appear in

person at the time of the drawing, or to do so at all till the day appointed for the medical examination, they are bound by law not to absent themselves, without explanation and special permission from their communal authorities, from their homes, during the period which may elapse between those two days. Hence, when, in the course of the morning of the day on which Beppo left Bella Luce, his absence became known, it was very clear to everybody what the state of the case was. Beppo Vanni was off to the hills—who would have thought it!—and old Paolo Vanni as able to buy twenty substitutes as one!

And, of course, in a very short space of time the news had reached Fano. Signor Sandro Bartoldi was the first to hear it.

“Whew—w—w—w!” whistled the attorney in long-drawn and dismayed surprise. “Surely,” he thought to himself, “neither old Vanni, nor Beppo himself, can have any notion of the gravity of the step he has taken, nor of the position he has placed himself in. Well, there is an end to everything between him and Lisa, at all events! It is fortunate, as it turns out, that Lisa never took to him. And that is why *la Giulia* is called home all of a sudden! She was sent to town to be out

of the way of Beppo. Beppo goes out of the way himself, and she is had back again. But, stop ! I see it all ! Three days ago comes old Vanni's letter to say that, by the priest's advice, Giulia is to go back. Priest's advice ! He need not have told me it was by the priest's advice. I should have known that very well, without telling. But the priest's advice to recall Giulia was given, then, three days before Beppo went off. His reverence was strong enough, when the girl was sent to town, on the necessity of separating her from the young man. What follows ? Why, that he knew that Beppo was going to take the key of the fields. Yes, depend upon it, it has been all that priest's doing ! I have not a doubt about it. Stingy as the old man is, he never would have dared to refuse to come forward on such an occasion, unless the priests had backed him up to it. Yes, that has been it. Poor young fellow ! Poor young fellow ! ”

And very shortly afterwards the real truth of the matter was known in the Palazzo Bollandini. And Giulia thought the news was very good news. She should not have to face Beppo when she went home the next day ; he would not have to serve in the horrid conscription ; he would not leave

the country ; Corporal Tenda and the soldiers all would leave it before very long ; then Beppo would return home, and would hear, perhaps, of the answer she had given to the Corporal's very handsome offer—freehold farm and all ; and then——though there never, never could be anything between them, Beppo might at last come to learn that she had never been false and worthless.

So Giulia, in her ignorance and her innocence, thought that the news from Bella Luce, of Beppo's flight, was very good news.

But that very evening—the evening before Farmer Vanni was to come to bring her home—there came to the Palazzo Bollandini, Captain Giacopo Brilli, although Lisa was not expected there that evening. And he came unaccompanied by Corporal Tenda ; and when *la Giulia* opened the door for him, he begged permission to speak with her for a few minutes.

What could it mean ? Had she rendered herself liable to any military penalties by refusing the Corporal ? It seemed to her by no means an improbable thing, that it might be so.

Captain Brilli very courteously motioned to her to sit down in one of the great arm-chairs in the hall, and then took the trouble of lugging another

all across the floor to sit beside her. What could be coming ?

"Signora Giulia," began the Captain, speaking very gravely, "my friend, Corporal Tenda, has made me acquainted with what passed between you and him the other day."

"Ah, yes ! that's it, sure enough," thought Giulia ; "I wonder what they can do to me ! They may put me under a state of siege, if they will, but they shan't make me marry the Corporal !"

"He perfectly understood your reply to him to be decisive, and would not have presumed to speak of the subject farther, but that circumstances have since occurred which produce a very notable difference in the situation. You have heard, of course, of the step which your cousin, who drew a bad number the other day, has unfortunately been persuaded to take ?"

The Captain looked at her, and waited for an answer.

"*Si*, Signor Capitano ; I know that Beppo has gone away," said Giulia.

"Had you known beforehand, may I ask, signora, that it was his intention to do so, in case he should draw a number obliging him to serve ?" asked the Captain.

"No, Signor Capitano ; I never heard of it till Signor Sandro told us here at the *palazzo*. And I was very much surprised ; for I thought that Signor Paolo, his father, would certainly pay for a substitute, as he is well able to do," answered Giulia, innocently, and with a manner which at once convinced Brilli that she was speaking the simple truth.

"It is a very unhappy thing that your cousin should have done this, signorina—unhappy for himself, and for all who are interested in him," said the Captain, very gravely. "He has been very badly advised," he continued. "Are you at all aware, Signorina Giulia, of the consequences to him of the step he has taken ?"

"I suppose he will be obliged to keep out of the way till the conscription is over, and the soldiers gone away out of the country," said Giulia, simply.

"You deceive yourself greatly, my poor signorina—very greatly," said the Captain, shaking his head, and looking at Giulia with an expression of pity that made her feel very uncomfortable ; for it was impossible for her to mistake the grave seriousness of the Captain's manner. "The conscription, as far as your cousin is concerned, will

never be over, as you call it. He will never be able to return to his home, except to give himself up as a deserter. The government will never cease from considering him as such, and hunting him down."

"Oh, Signor Capitano!" cried Giulia, in great distress and terror.

"It is as I tell you, signorina. As long as he remains away he is an outlaw and a bandit; he can never show his face at his home, or anywhere where he would be recognised. He is considered by the law in the same light as a criminal guilty of a crime which renders him infamous; he has no civil rights. And this will be his condition all his life, till he is taken as a deserter."

"Oh, Signor Capitano! Signor Capitano! have mercy on him! He did not know; indeed, indeed he did not know what the law was. Be merciful to him!" cried Giulia, amid sobs, which it was impossible for her to repress.

"I have no power in the matter, my poor child," said the Captain, much moved by her distress. "I have no authority, either to punish or to forgive. But I can advise. Calm yourself, signorina, and listen to me. I have no doubt that your cousin was not aware that the con-

sequences of absconding were such as I have told you. I have no doubt that he has been wickedly deceived. But if you have any doubt about the correctness of what I say, ask your friend, Signor Bartoldi, the lawyer. He will, I am sure, tell you the same."

"Oh, Signor Capitano! I am sure you would not tell me so to frighten me for nothing," said Giulia, who was now all in tears.

"Indeed I would not. Would that I could help you in the matter! But all that I can do is, as I said, to give advice. I must tell you honestly that I came to speak to you at the request of my friend Tenda. Of course, in the present state of your feelings, it was impossible that you should give him any answer except that which he received from you. I regret that it should be so; for Tenda is a good and worthy man, and will one of these days be in a position to offer a wife a very comfortable and desirable home. However, if it cannot be, it cannot; and there is an end of that. But when the Corporal heard this unfortunate news about your cousin, he was very anxious that two things should be stated to you: one with a view to any possibility there might still be for his own happiness, and the

other with a view to yours, which he charged me to assure you was, whatever his own lot might be, dearer to him than his own."

"I believe he is a very good man. It was a great grief to me to pain him," said poor Giulia, amid her tears.

"The two things he wished me to tell you," continued the Captain, "were these. In the first place, if your cousin should persist in sacrificing everything—his home, his position, his character—if he should determine recklessly to live the life of an outlaw and a bandit——"

"Oh! oh! oh!" groaned poor Giulia, as she heard a second time the terrible statement of Beppo's condition.

"It is evident that he must sacrifice also all domestic ties, all claim to the fulfilment of any promise, which, in point of fact, is rendered impossible by the situation he has made for himself. Now, in that view of the case, my friend Tenda wishes you to understand—but without pressing you for any answer, or urging you at all in point of time—that he considers the offer he made to you as still waiting your acceptance."

"Oh, no! no! no!" exclaimed Giulia, wring-

ing her hands. "If all the world was against Beppo, I should love him all the more! I can never love anybody else; indeed, indeed I can't! If he is to be all you say, Signor Capitano—if he must live all his life out on the mountains and in the caves—I would never, never leave him!"

And then, suddenly, a delicious thought flashed through her mind, that perhaps, after all, out of this flight and misfortune of Beppo might come the means of proving to him whether she had ever been false to him,—whether she was worthless. If he was to be an outlaw and a bandit, of course all the money and the farm would go to Carlo, and the great barrier between her and Beppo would be removed. And there rose up in her fancy a picture of Beppo, alone and unfriended, poor, with all the world turning its back on him; while she—alone, barefoot, out on the mountains, and hungry, perhaps—was by his side, loving, cherishing, and comforting him. And the thought was a very sweet one to her.

But he did not, would not love her—had already given her up—perhaps ceased to think of her. And that cold thought brought her mind

back to the reflection that, in the energy of her rejection of any other love, she had said more than she ought to have said,—that she was leading Captain Brillì and his friend to believe that Beppo was engaged to her. And she sought, with infinite bitterness and humiliation of feeling, to repair the error and undeceive them.

“I would not desert him in his trouble, that is,” she resumed, hesitating and blushing painfully; “not that I know that I could be of any use to him, or that he would thank me for meddling with his affairs. But—but all these misfortunes would make me too miserable—too miserable, you understand, Signor Capitano—to think—of—ever loving anybody.”

Captain Brillì looked at her with pity, and no little admiration. He thought that he did in some degree understand the nature of the case.

“Well, signorina, I have given you the first part of my message first, as I was requested to do,” he said; “now let me tell you the second. When we heard this news concerning your cousin, it was a matter of great grief to poor Tenda. ‘She loves him,’ he said, ‘and what can such a love produce to her but misery? If it cannot be that

her happiness can be made compatible with mine, there is but one way to prevent hers from being wrecked also. Explain to her all the consequences of what her cousin has done.' That, signorina, as you know, I have already done. 'Tell her,' he said, 'that the only way of saving her cousin is to induce him at once to return,—if possible, before the day of the examination,—then all would be well; but if not that, as soon as possible. If he gives himself up without any great delay, stating that he had been misguided and deceived, that he is ready to serve his time and make a true and good soldier, he will be tenderly dealt with—especially a man of his previously good character. It will be a good example to other deserters. He might depend upon his fault being forgiven. If she loves him, let her induce him to give himself up, or he is a lost man. With his education, good character, and advantages, he would be sure to do well in the army. He would serve his time, and all would go well. If he persists in his rebellion, he is ruined and lost.' All that, signorina, the Corporal desired me to tell you, for the sake of his care for your happiness with another, if it cannot be with him. I may add, on my own account, that every word of it is true. If you wish your

cousin well, and if you have any influence with him, or any possible means of exercising it, induce him to return and give himself up. If he does not, he is lost. And now, signorina, I will say adieu! It pains me to leave you in distress; but I can say no more. I will not go in to see *la Signora Dossi* this evening. I must report the issue of my conversation to poor Tenda, who is waiting for me. May I at least tell him that you will be guided by his advice?"

"Tell him, Signor Capitano, that he is very good and generous,—very generous," repeated Giulia, breaking out into fresh tears. "Tell him how much I thank him, and that, if it was possible in any way for me to do what he advises me, I should be so glad to do it. I am very much obliged to you, too, Signor Capitano. Oh! what would I have given that you could have said all that you have told me to poor Beppo!"

"I wish I could say as much to all the poor misguided fellows who will do the same thing," said the Captain. "The government knows," he added, "whom it has to thank for the misleading of them. Good night, signorina. God bless you! I wish you well."

And so Captain Brilli took his leave, and Giulia went to confide her sorrows and her difficulties to the sympathising heart of her mistress.



CHAPTER VII.

GIULIA AT THE CURA AGAIN.

IN THE Sunday morning Farmer Vanni made his appearance in Fano, as had been arranged, for the purpose of taking Giulia back to Bella Luce. He was in a more crusty and crabbed humour than usual, for, despite the arguments and the counsel of his friend and guide, Don Evandro, his conscience told him that he had been acting very badly. It is true that he had no idea of the gravity of the consequences of the step to which his son had been driven. He gave perfect credit to the priest's representations on that head. But he knew in his heart that the real determining motive with him was love for his *scudi*. He knew that other fathers, far less able to do so than he, were making every possible

sacrifice and effort to raise the means of procuring substitutes for their sons ; and he knew that many of those who were doing so were by no means friends of the new order of things. He knew that he was acting like a curmudgeon, and he knew that everybody else would think so. It was disagreeable to him to show himself in Fano under these circumstances ; and he was in an exceedingly bad temper accordingly.

He went directly, as usual, to the house of Signor Sandro ; and perceived at once that he was not received with the usual cordiality. *La Signora Lisa* was not visible. He was not shown into the private portion of the attorney's dwelling-house, but into his office.

"Good morning, Signor Paolo. Take a seat. This is a bad business of your son—a very bad business indeed ! I trust you have changed your mind, and are come with the money in your pocket to give me orders to look out for a substitute. If so, all might yet be managed in time before the day for the examination, and everything put straight."

"Beppo knows very well that I have no intention of doing anything of the sort, Signor Sandro. My money shall not go—more of it than I can

help—to bolster up the usurping government. But I did not come here to speak of Beppo, but to take *la Giulia* home. Is she here?"

"No! What should she be here for? She is at her mistress's house; and a thousand pities that she should not stay there, so well as they were getting on together. *La Signora Dossi* is as fond of her, as if she were her mother. But you know your own business best."

"Yes, I suppose I do. I ought to, at my time of life, at least."

"Oh! I say nothing—not a syllable! I never meddle with other people's business, unless when I am paid to do so! But really in this matter of your son, Signor Vanni, I could not reconcile it to my conscience if I was not to say a word to beg of you to reflect on the consequences to the young man. Consider——"

"I have considered! You don't suppose I made up my mind without considering, do you? Besides, I act under advice—the best advice! I know what I am doing."

"Oh! If you know what you are doing——Advice! I pretty well know all about the advice, or, at least, can guess! Signor Vanni, I would not let any man's advice come between me and my

son, if I was fortunate enough to have one, in such a matter !”

“And if you had a son, Signor Bartoldi, I should not presume to interfere with you in the management of his affairs.”

“That’s enough, Signor Vanni ! I say no more. A wilful man must have his way.”

“Can you send and fetch *la Giulia* ; so that I may be getting on my way home ?” said the farmer, who had, in fact, expected the usual hospitable invitation to dine with him from the attorney. But it was very evident, that that was not forthcoming. On the contrary, Signor Sandro said drily :

“Had you not better go for her yourself to the Palazzo Bollandini, Signor Vanni ?”

“I don’t know the way ; and I don’t know the woman she is with ; I never saw her !” said the farmer, testily.

“Oh ! as for that, I will send a boy to show you the way. And I think it would be more civil to *la Signora Dossi* to call on her yourself. Besides, I should have thought that you would have liked to speak to her about *la Giulia*.”

“I don’t want to speak to her ; and I dare say she don’t want to speak to me ! There’s little

enough of good to hear about *la Giulia*, by all accounts. I won't go to the Palazzo Bollandini. I gave the child up to you here, Signor Bartoldi; and I expect to receive her here from you;" said the farmer, speaking with the dogged, impassible manner which the *contadino* assumes when he means to be obstinate.

"Very well! very well! So be it! I will send for her at once;" replied the attorney, not wishing to enter into an unprofitable contest with the cross-grained old man.

He left the room as he spoke, in order to do as he purposed; and when he returned, he found the farmer standing up with his hat on, ready to go, as he said, for his *calessino*, which he would bring to the attorney's house, so that he might take up *la Giulia* there. The more simple plan would have been to wait for her, and then let her walk to the *osteria*; but the fact was that Signor Vanni was ill at ease in the attorney's presence, and feared a recommencement of his remonstrances on the subject of Beppo. The attorney was by no means ill pleased to get rid of him; but he did not escape without one parting shot, which was a telling one.

"Of course, Signor Vanni, after what you have

said," observed the attorney, as he was in the act of leaving the room, "I should not think of returning to the subject of Signor Beppo's affairs, as far as they concern you and him only. But there is one point that it is absolutely necessary for me to touch on. Of course you are aware that, if your son insists on placing himself in a position which the law brands as infamous, there can be nothing more between him and my daughter. All that scheme is of course at an end! I regret it; but of course you must have been aware that such must be one of the consequences of your determination."

"I acted as I thought proper, Signor Bartoldi; and as I thought for the best. I acted under good advice, as I have told you already. I hope you may be equally well counselled. As for Beppo and the Signorina Lisa, you can please yourself. Beppo will not have to go begging for a wife, I take it!"

"Faith! he may have to go begging for some other things besides a wife, before all is done!" said the attorney. "However, there is no more to be said. So now, Signor Vanni, I will wish you a good morning."

The farmer went and got his gig, taking good

care not to return so quickly as that Giulia should not have arrived at the attorney's house. He found her quite ready, with her little bundle by her side, and the fresh tears upon her face, in Signor Sandro's hall, from which *la Lisa* had just escaped, as soon as she had heard the *calessino* drive up to the door.

It cannot be supposed that Giulia's drive home to Bella Luce with the farmer was a very pleasant one. For a while no word was spoken between them. But as the horse began to walk up the first hill, after quitting the city, the old man said, almost with a snarl:—

"So you are like the bad *baiocco*, Signorina Giulia, you come back again!"

The "signorina," it will be understood, was in the old farmer's mouth purely ironical.

"I did not go for my pleasure, Signor Paolo," answered Giulia, with a sigh; "and it's not for my pleasure that I come back!"

"There's little pleasure to be got out of it, one way or the other, for all I see!" growled the cross old man.

"Very little, indeed, Signor Paolo; Heaven help me!" replied the poor girl, while the tears, which had of late had their reservoirs very

near the bright eyes that used to know so little of them, began to run silently down her cheeks.

"There, there's no good crying about it! There's the bit and sup for you, being, as you are, a Vanni!"

"'Worse luck!'" Giulia could not refrain from quoting after those words of the farmer, which she had never forgotten.

"What do you mean by that?" snarled the old man, turning sharply on her.

"It was you who said it, Signor Paolo!" said Giulia, looking up through her tears.

"Then I suppose I meant it! but that's no reason you should say it, or think it either!" growled the farmer.

And then nothing more was said till they were going up the last hill to Bella Luce.

"I don't want to have any talk at home, mind you," the old man then said, "about anything in the city, not what this fool said, or t'other fool tattled. Do you hear? You say nothing to anybody, and nobody will say anything to you. And I am sure that ought to suit your book best! Do you hear?" he repeated, after a pause. For Giulia was pondering what was the meaning of this pro-

hibition, and what the sneer which concluded it was intended to point at.

"Yes, Signor Paolo!" she said, submissively.

"Well! mind it *is* yes! And now hold the horse till I send Carlo to put him in the stable."

So there she was at home once more; and old Sunta, who was really glad to have her back again, received her somewhat more kindly than the old man; and Carlo stared and giggled, and spoke in inuendos, and tried in vain to make her talk whenever he could get an opportunity, which was, fortunately for her, rarely enough out of the hearing of his parents; and very shortly her life fell into the old accustomed daily routine,—all, with the exception of one great void in it,—one absence, which, unspoken of, unalluded to, seemed to make her entire existence and all its surroundings unreal, dreamlike, sapless, and feckless!

Of course, after what had been said to her by Captain Brilli, Giulia's great and first object at Bella Luce was, if possible, to find the means of communicating with Beppo. But it was extremely difficult to do this. She did not see any possible means of achieving even the first step, of ascertaining where he was. In fact, there was only one human being at Santa Lucia who was

cognisant of Beppo's whereabouts,—the priest, Don Evandro. Giulia naturally supposed that his place of hiding was known also to the members of his family,—to his father at least. But, even if this had been the case, she would have been no nearer her object ; for of course she could not ask them for the information. But the priest had chosen to keep that secret to himself. He chose to be the only medium of communication between Bella Luce and the fugitive, for he could not be sure otherwise of what nature the communications might be.

In vain, therefore, Giulia waited, and hoped to hear something said in the family which might afford her a clue. Beppo was never mentioned by them, any more than if he had not been in existence.

And the fatal day of the medical examination, when his absence would be notified to the military authorities, and he would be branded as a deserter, drew nigh. It came at last ; and still Giulia was no nearer to the object, which was now the chief and indeed, it may be said, the only one of her life.

After some days, the thought occurred to her that possibly some chance might arise, some

means of communicating with him offer itself suddenly, and be lost for want of her being prepared to take advantage of it. The preparation of a letter was to her, though not, as to many of her class and station, an impossibility, yet a matter of time and difficulty. So she thought that, as a measure of precaution, it would be well to have a letter written in readiness.

The first step towards this was to obtain the means of writing. And this was not altogether so easy a matter as it might seem to damsels living under different conditions of existence. Pen and ink were indeed easily obtainable. For those which Beppo used in the good old days, when Beppo was still at Bella Luce, to make out the farm accounts, and to which Carlo had now succeeded, were kept in a drawer of the great table in the kitchen. And there would be no difficulty in abstracting them at night, to be used in the privacy of her room, and replacing them before there was any chance of their being missed in the morning. But then, how to get a sheet of paper? Giulia's penmanship was not capable of putting what it would be necessary for her to say into the compass of a small bit of paper. A whole sheet of foolscap was absolutely necessary to the achieve-

ment of her object. And how to obtain this? It would be easy to go to the village shop and purchase what she wanted. But *che! Vi pare!* As if it would not be all over Santa Lucia the next day! "*La Giulia* has been asking for paper! Who is she writing to, I wonder?" "Eh! some friend left behind in Fano! Girls don't go to stay in the city for nothing!" &c., &c., &c. And then cross-questioning at home! No! that would never do!

After much meditation on this knotty difficulty, however, she hit upon a stratagem, under cover of which, she thought, the thing might be done. She might write a letter to *la Dossi*. It was very natural that she should do so. That would be avowable. It would also seem very natural that she should require two sheets of paper for the purpose,—for would not one be needed for the rough copy? By this means she thought she might venture to make a purchase of paper openly.

So she said one day to *la Sunta*, "*Signora*, will you please allow me go up to Santa Lucia this afternoon? I want to buy some paper to write a letter to *la Signora Dossi*, the lady I was with at Fano."

La Sunta made no objection to this, but told

her to call at the same time and pay her respects to *la Nunziata*, the priest's housekeeper, whom she had not seen since her return.

The paper was purchased accordingly,—*two* sheets of foolscap paper,—out of Giulia's own private resources ; for, thanks to the small modicum of wage to be received from *la Signora Dossi*, who at parting had been liberal in the matter, Giulia was not wholly without money.

"I want a couple of sheets of paper, if you please," said she ; taking care to add her justification, for the benefit of the *Santa Lucia* gossips. "I must write a letter to *la Signora Dossi*, the lady I was living with at Fano."

Then she paid her visit to *la Nunziata*, who made her promise, that if *la Signora Sunta* would spare her, Giulia would come up to the *cura* on the morrow, and lend her a helping-hand for a day, as she used to do, "before," said *la Nunziata*, "you were turned into a fine city lady."

It was settled accordingly that Giulia was to spend the following day at *Santa Lucia*.

And that evening, after supper, she quietly took the pens and ink from among the fragments of old accounts, skewers, broken dinner knives,

bits of twine, an old almanac, and one or two little prints of saints, in the drawer of the great kitchen table, and carried them off to her room.

She had to write two letters ; and much extra care and labour had to be expended upon them, because it was necessary that they should be composed and executed without the assistance of a second copy.

The far easier and shorter epistle, which was to serve merely as a blind for the other, was, however, soon managed, and ran thus :—

“ Stimatissima Signora Dossi.”

(These words were written at the top of the paper, on the left-hand side ; then a good way down, on the right-hand side, followed the date) :

“ Bella Luce, —th June, 186—.”

(Then another much wider space was left, seeing that the wideness of it indicated the degree of respect in which the writer’s correspondent was held ; and then the letter began.)

“ I arrived at Bella Luce safe and well, and am so at this writing ; hoping that you are the same. I hope that you have found some better and more fortunate person than me to serve you ; and I

hope that she can please you in the cooking. When you see *la Lisa*, and *il Signor Capitano Brillì*, and *il Signor Caporale*, please to give them my kind remembrances." "Turn over."

(For so low down the sheet had Giulia's abounding respect compelled her to begin her letter, and so large was the writing, that she had already reached the bottom of the page; and the letter was resumed on the other side no higher up than on the first page.)

"The vines in this district are looking very well. The *grittochammia* (it was the only word misspelt in the letter; and of course Giulia had no knowledge of it, save hearing it constantly in the mouths of the farmer and his sons) is not much; and we hope to drink a glass of wine this year. Dear Signora Dossi, I am very grateful to you for your kindness to me. I try not to forget the things you taught me; but there is little to be done in the way of fine cooking at Bella Luce."

(This filled the whole of the second page, or of that portion of it which was written on, rather; and furnished a line or two for the third page, beginning at the same distance down the paper. The whole of the remaining space was occu-

pied by the subscription, carefully distributed in equidistant lines.)

“ I am,

“ With the most distinguished homage and
obsequiousness,

“ Of your ladyship,

“ The most humble and obedient

“ Slave and servant,

“ GIULIA VANNI ”

The last words written in the very bottommost corner of the paper, in token of the humility of the writer.

This show letter having been thus felicitously accomplished, according to all the prescriptions of correct good breeding and the latest Romagnole genteel letter-writer, Giulia proceeded to the more important and more difficult part of her task.

“ Caro Signor Beppo,” she began ; then, after some time lost in meditation, which threatened to run off into mere castle-building and reverie, drew her pen through *caro*, and wrote *carissimo* over it ;—then, after gazing a little at the effect of the words so written, with sudden haste blotted

out both adjectives, elaborately satisfying herself that there was no possibility of reading the word that had been written on that spot. How could the reader guess what might have been the writer's first intention? It might have been "odious," or "abominable," for all that anybody could tell!

So it stood, "(great blot) Signor Beppo,

"I know that it does not become me to write to you ; and that you have no wish to hear from me ; but if you will please to read my letter a little further, and not throw it away in anger directly, you will see that I do not wish to write about myself. Dear Beppo" (*dear* again carefully blotted out), "before I came home from Fano, which was on the Sunday after you went away, I heard some very dreadful things, which you ought to know ; for I am sure you do not know them. I am sure that you have gone away deceived, and led by bad advice. You think you can come home, in a little time, when the soldiers are gone away. But it is not so. You will never be let to come back any more in all your life till you give yourself up as a deserter. The lawyers and the government say that you are an outlaw and a bandit ; and they will never give over hunting you

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till they have caught you, if it should be all your life. And then you will be punished as a deserter. But if you make haste to give yourself up, your going away will be pardoned; and all will be forgotten. If you have been told different from this by any one, it is a wicked falsehood, for this is the truth. And Signor Sandro, the lawyer, would tell you the same. Oh! Signor Beppo, for the love of the Holy Virgin and all the saints, do, do come back! Signor Paolo is very angry because Signor Sandro told him, that of course there could never be anything now between you and Lisa, since you had gone against the law. I would not tell you this to vex you, if you cared about Lisa; but I know you did not think of her. If my being here was in the way of your coming back, I would go away, if it was to beg my bread. But you need not come here. You must go to Fano, and serve your time in the army. And when you come back, if it is a pain to you to see me here, I will go away, without asking leave of anybody. So do not let that prevent your coming back. Pray, pray do come! For the love of Heaven do not make yourself a bandit, who can never come home, or be his father's heir, or settle in any way. I will not trouble you by

writing anything about myself, for I know that I am now nothing to you. Do not suppose that I write this to induce you to think more kindly of me. I solemnly swear that it is not so; and that I write only for your own sake. I am very, very unhappy; and have no thought about myself. I write to prevent you from ruining yourself entirely. For God's sake, for the sake of your father and mother, come back!

"I have written this in order to have it ready to send, if I can find out where you are, and can find the means of sending it. At this present time, I do not know where you are, and there is nobody who will tell me.

"Your loving" (scratched out) "cousin,

"GIULIA."

The composition of this letter occupied Giulia the greatest part of the night; and when she read it over, she was so dissatisfied with it that she would fain have essayed a second attempt; but she had neither the time nor the paper. So she folded it, and fastened it with half a wafer picked out of the dust in the standish that held the Bella Luce inkstand, and secured it carefully within the lining of her stays; to be always

carried about with her, till some opportunity might offer itself of sending it.

It was fortunate that she had no longer deferred this precautionary measure; for it so happened that the opportunity so long sought in vain, presented itself on the following day.

That day was to be spent at the *cura*; and Giulia went thither early in the morning, as had formerly been her habit on such occasions. Don Evandro was absent in the church, saying his early mass, when she arrived; but when on returning he passed through the kitchen to his study, and she stood up to salute him, he merely recognised her presence by a little nod, and passed on without speaking. As soon as he was in his study, Nunziata carried in to him his cup of black coffee and the little bit of dry toast that constituted his *colezione*, and then leaving Giulia some household task to do, and telling her that the priest was at his books, and would most likely not come out of his study any more before the *angelus*, went out into the village to get the profit of Giulia's assistance by indulging in a morning of gossip.

She had not been gone above half an hour, and Giulia was busy with the task that had been

assigned to her in the kitchen, through which the only entrance into the *cura* opened, when a rough-looking young man, a stranger to Santa Lucia, dusty and evidently travel-worn, presented himself at the kitchen door and demanded to speak with the *curato*. Giulia asked him if she should tell the *curato* who it was that wanted him, for otherwise the priest would probably refuse to see him.

"Tell him," said the stranger, "that there is one from Piobico, who wants to speak with him."

Giulia did as was desired; and the "one from Piobico" was forthwith told to pass into the study.

There was nothing at all strange or remarkable in this. But—preoccupied as Giulia's head and imagination were with Beppo and his fortunes, and with the possibility of obtaining information as to his place of hiding, and persuaded, as she was, that the priest knew all about it—the possibility rushed into her mind, that this stranger, arriving from a distance, and having to all appearance been travelling all night, might be the bearer of communications between Don Evandro and Beppo. The more she dwelt on

this possibility, while the man was in the priest's study, the more it seemed to grow into a probability. He came from Piobico. Giulia had heard of Piobico as a place "in the mountains." Beppo had "taken to the mountains!" At all events it was a possibility which she would not let slip; and she screwed up her courage, determined to try a bold stroke for the object she had in view.

She had about her all the little store of money she had received from *la Dossi*, less the price of the two sheets of paper. She took it out and looked at it. It was a large sum in Giulia's eyes;—far larger than she had ever before possessed. She divided it into two halves; and, putting back the one moiety into her pocket, kept the other in her hand, ready for the emergency to which she destined it.

Presently the stranger came out, and, with a nod to her, passed through the kitchen, and took his way, as Giulia, looking after him, observed, not towards the village, but across the churchyard towards the old ruined tower. He was apparently about to return at once to Piobico without entering the village at all. Giulia let him go until he was nearly across the little churchyard; and then,

with one sharp glance at the door of the study to see that it was shut and all still within it, she darted out of the kitchen, closing the door behind her, and overtook the traveller just as he reached the foot of the ruined tower.

"Young man!" she said, stepping round the base of the tower so as to place herself out of sight of the *cura*, or of anybody going to or from it, "you have come from Beppo Vanni in the hills to his reverence!"

"Yes, I have!" said the man, after staring at her in much surprise for a minute; "but I was to speak to no one on any account but the *curato* himself. And I thought——"

"Tell me where Beppo is hiding?" said Giulia, simply.

"Begging your pardon, signora, that is just what I must *not* tell, seeing that you do not know it. If he is away in the hills, I suppose it is on purpose folks mayn't know where he is."

"Of course, he is hiding away from the government people! We all know that! But do you think I look like a government officer, or a spy either?"

"No, signorina! I can't say I think you do!" said the young man, responding to her

challenge by a sufficiently prolonged examination.

"I am a——friend of Beppo's," she said, affecting to hang down her head and look shy, on purpose to lead the messenger to form a very natural conclusion as to the nature of the interest she took in the fugitive, and of the message he was to be asked to take between them. "And look here," she continued, opening her hand, and showing a dollar and some small coins, "if you will tell me where he is, and take this letter to him, I will give you all this ; and as much more, if you will bring me back an answer from him."

"I would not tell any of them, that should not know, not for six times that money," said the man, looking at the coins in her hand ; "but I suppose there can be no harm in telling such as you. You will tell no living soul?"

"Not a soul ! I would not do him a mischief for all the world !" said Giulia, with no need of adding any affected earnestness to the asseveration.

"Well ! he is with the friars at Santa Maria della Valle d'Abisso, in the 'mountain above Piobico. Give me the letter !"

"Here ! There is no address on it ; but it does not signify. You will give it into his own hand?"

"I will, before to-morrow night! never fear! But how am I to do about bringing you back his answer?"

"Look here!" said Giulia, after casting her eyes about a little; "put it into this hole, see, under this brick at the corner of the tower!"

"Ah! but how am I to get the money for bringing it?" said the man, with a shrewd grin.

"Oh, I will put the money in the same place," said Giulia, innocently. "You take out the money; and put the answer in its place!"

"Well!" said the stranger, looking at her with great surprise. "I wonder whether all the Santa Lucia folks are as trusting as you are. It would not be difficult to steal your head off your shoulders! Why, signorina, what is to hinder me from taking the money, and putting nothing in the place of it?"

"Oh! you would not cheat a poor girl in that way, I am sure! I am but a poor girl; and this money," said Giulia, taking out the remaining half, which she had reserved, "is all I have in the world! See, I will leave it in the hole now. You may come back and rob me, if you will, as soon as my back is turned! But I am not afraid that you will do anything of the sort."

"Very good! I won't rob you, signora! I will bring you a letter,—that is, if Signor Beppo will give me one to bring. If not, I shan't come back for the money. But it's no good your coming to look for it for the next four days. And it may be longer before I can return."

"Be as quick as you can! See, there is the money; it's quite safe in the hole. Good bye! I must run back to the *cura*!"

And Giulia regained the kitchen before any one had become aware of her absence.

"Oh! what a *benedizione della Santa Vergine* it was, that I wrote the letter last night!" thought she to herself. "Santa Maria della Valle d' Abisso, sopra Piobico!" she repeated to herself carefully; —and said the words over and over again to herself at intervals during the remainder of the day.



CHAPTER VIII.

THE SCREW.

THE day of the medical examination came and passed; and, as we know, Beppo was among the defaulters. The number of these was very large; and the government was strongly impressed with the absolute necessity of taking vigorous measures, not only to get possession of the men who were missing, but to check the practice of desertion. They were almost invariably the best men who had absconded. The town populations, though far less fitted for military service, were far less averse to it. The missing men were almost entirely the fine young *contadini* of the hills;—the very flower of the population!

The authorities were exceedingly annoyed. Yet they were desirous of dealing as mercifully

as possible with the defaulters. For it was well known that the parish priests were active in stimulating them to desertion ; and the influence of the clergy upon the rural populations was still very powerful.

One of the measures adopted for inducing the absentees to return, was the quartering of a few soldiers in the houses of their families, to be removed only when the missing men should give themselves up. And in many instances this succeeded in producing the desired result. The maintenance of the soldiers caused an expense and annoyance which the families could ill endure. There were rarely wanting means of communication between the men absent in the hills and their friends at home ; and thus the screw put on produced its effect.

“What an infamous shame it is !” said one of three or four military officers who were engaged in arranging the infliction of this penalty on the families of the recalcitrant and contumacious conscripts. “Look at this case now ! Giuseppe Vanni ! the eldest of two grown-up sons ;—a remarkably fine young man ;—noted to be of good character ;—the father more than well-to-do ! a rich man in his class ! And this fellow goes off

to the hills!—sacrifices everything rather than obey the law and serve his country! The old curmudgeon of a father won't even pay the cost of a substitute! Too disaffected for that, I suppose; as well as too stingy;—one or both! It is too bad!”

“Where is he from?” asked a superior officer.

“A village called Santa Lucia, out in the hills to the north-west,” replied the first speaker, who had a variety of papers before him.

“Who is the parish priest?” asked the first.

“One Evandro Baluffi.”

“Have you any note of him?”

“Yes! here we have his reverence!” replied the other, after referring to a list of names among the papers before him. “The Reverend Evandro Baluffi; an active, intriguing, political priest, and determined adherent of the Papal government.”

“Ay! that's where it is! It is useless trying to do anything with these poor ignorant *contadini*, as long as these fellows are allowed to poison their minds and sow disaffection! No good will be done till the government makes up its mind to lay a heavy hand on a few of these mischief-making firebrands. Perhaps we may trounce the Reverend Evandro Baluffi yet. Meantime put a

heavyish party on the rich old farmer at Santa Lucia. If he is stingy, that may work !”

“I think I can tell you, Colonel, how to make that blister draw !” said a younger man, who had not yet spoken. “I happen to have picked up from a friend of mine a little bit of this Giuseppe Vanni’s history, which may, perhaps, be turned to good account. He is one of the finest young fellows in the country,—over six feet in his stockings ;—a fellow we ought not to lose on any account. Well, it seems this young gentleman has a very handsome cousin, who was living here in service in Fano a week or two back ; but is now gone home to the paternal farmhouse. And there seems to have been rather a warm flirtation between a Corporal of ours, a man of the name of Tenda, and the pretty Giulia Vanni, to the infinite disgust and distress of her tall cousin, who, of course, is in love with *la bella* Giulia. Now, what do you say to sending Tenda with four or five men up to Santa Lucia ? If *that* don’t draw my gentleman, I think nothing will !”

There was a general laugh at the young Captain’s plan of thus making the contumacious Beppo’s jealousy a screw which might prove to

be irresistible, and sending the Corporal on duty which would be most efficiently discharged by making assiduous love to a pretty girl.

"Upon my life, I think the notion is a very good one!" said the Colonel. "It will serve him very right; and, as you say, will bring him in if anything can. Let the lucky Corporal be quartered on Signor Vanni, senior, by all means."

So a little note was made on a big sheet of paper by the officer who had first spoken; it was decided that this terrible "screw" should be put on poor Beppo; and the military board passed on to the next case.

On the evening of the second day after the above little conversation had taken place, and the next after Giulia had spent her day at the *cura*, Corporal Tenda, with four men at his back, presented himself at Bella Luce, and exhibited to *la Sunta* a laconic document, requiring, in the name of the law, Paolo Vanni, cultivator and tenant at Bella Luce, in the commune of Santa Lucia, to house and maintain the five men named in it; and intimating that they would continue to be his guests till such time as his son, Giuseppe Vanni, duly drawn to serve in his

Majesty's army, should be in the hands of the military authorities !

Poor Sunta had not the gift of reading ; and, in no little terror, called Giulia down from up-stairs to explain what might be the meaning of this invasion of Bella Luce by an armed force. For Signor Paolo and his son Carlo had not yet returned from the field.

The Corporal had had the consideration to tell his men to remain outside at the front of the house, until he should have spoken with the inmates and explained to them the nature of their errand.

So, when Giulia came down at the call of *la padrona*, she found herself, it may be imagined with what astonishment, face to face with her rejected admirer !

But other feelings besides astonishment contributed to produce the vivid blush all over her face and neck, and the painful embarrassment which was evident in her manner. The mother had guessed at once that this unprecedented and alarming appearance of the *forza pubblica* had reference to the unhappy fugitive who was, she knew, absent in defiance of the law. She doubted not that the soldiers were come to take

her son by force ; and she derived some comfort from the thought that they would not find him. But Giulia may be forgiven if, seeing the Corporal there alone bowing low before her, her first idea was that he had come there to urge his suit to herself. Then tumultuously rushed into her mind the horrid thought of the appearance this arrival of the Corporal would wear in Beppo's eyes ! What would he not think of her !

But the worthy little Corporal did not leave her long in error.

"Do not, I beg of you, *stimatissima* Signora Giulia,"—*most esteemed* Signora Giulia ; not "*gentilissima*" or "*bellissima*," as it used to be in Palazzo Bollandini at Fano ; and Giulia marked and appreciated the change of style ;—"do not for a moment suppose, most esteemed Signora Giulia, that I am here to trouble you with any renewal of a subject that has been set at rest between us. You know my sentiments on the subject by means of my kind friend Captain Brilli,—*e basta !* I come here to-day in obedience to no wish of my own ; but in the execution of military duty. You will, I am sure, rightly appreciate my feelings, when I confess that, had my own wishes been consulted on the subject, I

could have desired that the painful duty assigned to me had been entrusted to another. But duty is the soldier's religion, signora; and it only remains for me to discharge that duty as little painfully to you and this respectable family as is compatible with the orders I am bound to obey!"

"What is it all about?" asked *la Sunta*, more utterly mystified than ever. "If they are come for Beppo, let them search the house, from garret to cellar; and there is an end of it! We know nothing about him, more's the pity!"

"But you have not stated, Signor Caporale, what the duty is which calls you here;" said Giulia, somewhat tranquillised by the Corporal's diffusive oratory.

"I have had the honour of presenting a billet to this excellent lady, whom I presume to be the mistress of the house, which indicates the nature of my business here. In a word, Signora Giulia, myself and four men—there they are outside there—are quartered here until such time as Signor Beppo may decide on returning and placing himself in conformity with the law."

"Quartered here! in this house! Five soldiers!" screamed *la padrona*, horrified and out-

raged to the utmost degree! "And you are to stay here till Beppo gives himself up! You may stay till you all lie in Santa Lucia churchyard, then! But it is impossible; it's unheard of!"

"You may guess, excellent signora, that it is not a pleasant duty for a soldier to perform, to force himself as an unwelcome guest, and make his presence a means of punishment. But orders must be obeyed! Duty admits of no refusal. It has been determined by the government to quarter soldiers on the families of the contumacious conscripts, as a means of inducing them to give themselves up. Permit me to assure you, signora, that if I express the hope that Signor Beppo may be very shortly induced to do so, it is wholly in his own interest, and in no wise in my own, that I speak."

"But it is infamous! a robbery! a spoliation! We are poor people! We have no means of lodging five men, let alone keeping them! What will Paolo say, when he comes in?" stormed poor Sunta, as the whole extent of the infliction began to be comprehended by her.

"Signor Paolo will doubtless have the good sense, my dear Signora Vanni, to know that the law must be obeyed, and that we are but the

humble instruments of it ! I am afraid, Signora Giulia, that it would be in keeping with the spirit of our orders to make our presence here as disagreeable in all ways as possible. But I trust that I may be able to contribute to the views of the government in a manner more consonant to my own feelings. My first duty, Signora Vanni, is to assure myself that the conscript, Giuseppe Vanni, is not concealed in this house or neighbourhood. But if the Signora Giulia, whom I have had the honour of meeting under other circumstances, will assure me that her cousin is not in the neighbourhood, no search could make me so certain of the fact as her word. If she cannot give me that word, she will say nothing, and leave us to perform our duty of searching."

"I can assure you most sincerely, Signor Caporale, that Beppo is nowhere in this neighbourhood. He is a long way off in the hills."

"That is quite sufficient, signora ! It would be useless to make any search."

Giulia, as soon as ever the foregoing words were out of her lips, bethought her that she was betraying to *la Sunta* more knowledge of Beppo's movements, than she could be supposed to possess, and she glanced sharply at the *padrona* to

see if any such suspicion had been awakened in her mind. But *la Sunta* considered it too much a matter of course to make any kind of denial to the ministers of the law, for any such thought to have entered her head.

"Giulia, child," she said, "just run down to the field and tell the *padrone* what has come upon us! I am sure I don't know what to do or to say!"

Giulia ran off, not sorry to escape from any further share in so disagreeable a scene; and the Corporal, with many civil speeches to the old lady, caused his men to enter the kitchen, and seat themselves in a row on the bench outside the large table; so that when Giulia returned with the farmer, the latter, on entering his house, was confronted by the significant spectacle of five hungry men occupying the entire length of his supper-table.

Farmer Vanni fumed, and stormed, and raved; and the good-humoured Corporal met all his ill-temper with the most imperturbable affability and good-nature; for was this not Giulia's dwelling, and was she not there to suffer from the violence of any quarrel? So at last the five unwelcome guests sat down to the supper-table

of their unwilling host, and beds, as well as the resources of the house allowed, were prepared for the men in the sort of outhouse beyond the kitchen, and for the Corporal in the room above it.

And so matters continued for a few days, while old Paolo groaned in secret over the cost of keeping his unwelcome guests, and seasoned every mid-day and evening repast with invectives against the government, which practised such atrocities and extortions in the name of liberty. He had two or three private interviews with the priest during this time, going up to Santa Lucia for the purpose; for while the soldiers were at Bella Luce, Don Evandro never once made his appearance there. Nor did the farmer let drop any word at home, which could give the members of his family any information respecting the nature or subject of his communications with the priest.

The Corporal and his men were very constantly absent from Bella Luce, beating the country, and making inquiries in the hope of catching the fugitive; but always coming back to roost and to feed. Scarcely anything passed between the Corporal and Giulia; for she lived

as much up-stairs as possible, and kept herself to the utmost of her power out of his way. And he, on the other hand, uniformly treated her with the most deferential respect, and made no attempt whatever to thrust his company upon her.

Nevertheless, she had an uncomfortable sense of being, however unobtrusively and undemonstratively, subjected to surveillance. She felt that her movements were watched. And she determined, therefore, to be very much on her guard in going up to the old tower above the church to look for the answer to her letter. It was the fifth day from that on which she had bribed the messenger, who had described himself as "one from Piobico," and had sent by him her letter to her cousin. He had spoken of being back with an answer on the fourth or fifth; and Giulia had counted the intervening days and hours with the utmost anxiety and impatience. Nevertheless, she had not dared to go to the tower for fear of the watching of the Corporal and his men.

On the evening of the fifth day, having found it impossible to accomplish her object without the risk of detection from the vigilance of the soldiers at the farm, she asked old Sunta for per-

mission to go and pay a visit to *la Nunziata*, intending to make an arrangement with her for passing the next day at the *cura*, and thinking that she should so withdraw herself from the watchfulness of the Corporal, and easily find a moment during the day, when she might without any risk of detection flit across the churchyard, and see whether in the hole in the corner of the old tower there was any reply for her.

There was no difficulty in leading the priest's housekeeper to make the proposal her visitor desired ; and *la padrona*, when the request was made to her, had no objection to it. So, early the next morning, Giulia walked up to Santa Lucia, delighting herself with the thought that in the course of the day she should surely find an opportunity of getting her letter,—if, indeed, Beppo had sent her one. But to her great surprise and annoyance, a sudden sense of their religious duties appeared to have come upon two of Corporal Tenda's little company, and for the first time since they had been at Bella Luce, they felt the necessity of attending early mass at the parish church. And not only did they attend the early mass in the most exemplary manner, but they remained hanging about the church and the

churchyard the whole of the day. Again and again Giulia looked out from the door of the priest's kitchen ; and there always, either lounging about the gate which led from the churchyard to the village, or tranquilly smoking their cigars, reclining on the turf, or examining the appearance of the old tower with a newly awakened sense of its picturesque and antiquarian interest, were the two warriors of King Victor Emmanuel's army ; and there they remained all day, only returning to their supper at Bella Luce, after Giulia, in despair of being able to achieve her object, had bidden *la Nunziata* good night, and started on her own homeward walk.

It was clear that, without some very strong and decided measure, she would never be able to get unwatched to the old tower. But the longing within her to know whether Beppo had answered her or not, was too strong to be put off. The only chance of paying a visit to the tower safely was at night. She could go, making all speed from Bella Luce, and be back in little more than an hour. There was little or no difficulty in getting out of the simply, and often, in summer, scarcely-fastened door of the farm-house. The soldiers would doubtless be as fast asleep as the

members of the family; and, in short, Giulia determined to make the venture that night.

So, about two hours after everybody had gone to bed—about midnight, that is to say,—Giulia, who had not undressed herself, quietly stole down, and though rather startled at observing, as she passed through the kitchen, that the door of communication between it and the room in which the soldiers were sleeping was wide open, stepped lightly across the former room to the door of the house, opened it with as little noise as possible, and started on her errand, running along the well-known path as fast as her feet would carry her. She had not the slightest fear of any sort, except that of being seen by some one. None of those more imaginative terrors, which might have assailed an English girl bound on a similar expedition through two miles of country looking weird and strange in the moonlight, with a churchyard to cross at the end of it, had any influence over the imagination of the daughter of the Apennine. The southern mind is almost exclusively conversant with fancies and associations of a more material description; and rarely busies itself much with ghostly terrors.

Giulia sped along the path, stopping for a

second or two now and then to listen if all was still around her—especially at the half-way tree,—crossed the churchyard, and made direct for the old tower just outside the further confines of it.

It was some little time before she could find the hole at the corner of the tower in which she had so confidently placed her money, and in which she hoped now to find a letter from Beppo. The spot agreed upon was at the back of the tower, if that side may be called so, which was farthest from the church and the village; for it was on that side that she and the “one from Piobico” had had their interview. But the moonlight, which was falling full on the other side of the ruin, had the effect of throwing the contrary side into double gloom, and seemed to confuse all the forms and relative positions of the objects.

However, after a little while she discovered the hole in the brickwork, thrust in her hand eagerly, and found that the money was gone, and that there was a small slip of folded paper in its place!

Her first impulse was to thrust the paper into her bosom, and run home with it as fast as possible, keeping the perusal of it for the leisure and safety of her own room. But she remembered that she had no light at home; that it would be

difficult to procure one without running a risk of waking somebody, and thus leading to the detection of her escapade; that it would be impossible for her to read her letter at home till the next day; and that it would be dreadful to have to wait all that time before knowing what Beppo had written to her, in what mood he had received her letter, and in what tone replied to it.

She thought that the moonlight on the other side of the tower would suffice to enable her to read it, and still breathless with her running and with her anxiety, she stepped round into the light, not looking up, but gazing on the precious bit of paper while, as she moved, she unfolded it in the full light of the moonbeam, and read easily enough, in Beppo's large coarse characters, the words, "On Sunday evening, two hours after the Ave Maria, I will be at the old tower where this is to be left, hoping to see there *one person only*." There was neither signature nor address; but they were not at all necessary to the end in view.

Giulia, after the manner of peasants, who are unaccustomed to the process of reading with the eyes only, had read these words, not aloud, but a little above her breath, and with a thrill of

delight at her heart, was thrusting the precious paper into her bosom, and in the act of turning to make the best of her way back to Bella Luce, when she became aware of two figures standing immediately before her, and looking up with a scream recognised the same two soldiers who had been on the watch in the churchyard all day.

In the next instant she recovered sufficient presence of mind to say, though with a beating heart, and rather broken utterance :

"I did not know, Signori, that it was part of your duty to watch and molest a poor girl who might have her reasons for wishing to see somebody in private."

"It's no part of our duty, Signora, to give you any trouble or annoyance that we can any way avoid," answered one of the men, speaking in a very respectful manner; "but our business is to find the missing conscript if we can, by hook or by crook. And when my comrade heard the door of the house down yonder opened, he thought it best to see what was going on. And when he saw your ladyship starting off up the hill at that time of night, and all on the sly, he thought, and I thought too, when he waked me in a hurry, that it was likely enough you were after corre-

sponding in some way or other with our man. So we just made free to follow you; and if so it was that you had any other matter in hand, why there was no harm done; for we should have known better than to blab. But as it is, you see, our duty will oblige us to be here at two hours after the Ave Maria on Sunday evening."

All the blood in Giulia's body seemed to rush with sudden violence to her heart, as these words smote her ear. She glared at the two men, as a mad momentary thought dashed into her brain, whether she could not spring at the throat of the speaker, and secure Beppo's safety by strangling the life out of him and his comrade on the spot. But in the next instant a full sense of her utter powerlessness came over her, and she threw herself on the ground, crying:

"Oh! Beppo! Beppo! And it is I who have destroyed him. And he will think that I have betrayed him!"

And then the horrible thought came to her mind that Beppo would suppose, not only that he was betrayed, but that he was betrayed by her connivance with the Corporal, and that her passion for him had been the incitement to the base act! It was too dreadful! too cruel! she

could not live to meet that day, and to face the look of Beppo's eye, when that conviction, as inevitably must be the case, should have reached his mind.

"*O Santa Vergine dei sette dolori!*—mother of sorrows, and of the sorrowing! Oh! let me die! let me die! I cannot bear it! I cannot bear it! O Santissima Maria, have pity! take me away! take me to thee!"

And the poor girl writhed on the ground in the agony of her soul.

"But, Signora," said one of the soldiers, who stood by perfectly well understanding the whole force and pressure of the circumstances, and not a little distressed by the grief of the beautiful girl on the ground at their feet,—“there is no question of destroying your cousin! It's the best thing for him, any way. And, bless you, he'll find that out fast enough. By the time he has been six months in the ranks, he'll thank you for being the means of putting him there, instead of being skulking and hiding about in the mountains like a wild beast.”

“And as for betraying,” added the other soldier, “there'll be no question at all of betraying. We shall report the thing to our Corporal just

as it is, and he'll let Signor Beppo know how it came about, and that you was in no way consenting to it."

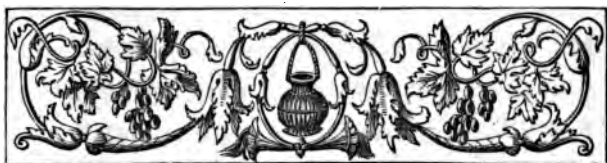
"Oh, no, no, no! not the Corporal,—not the Corporal!" groaned Giulia, without any clear idea, save that no good, and nothing but sorrow and misery, could arise from any meeting between Beppo and Tenda.

"Well, Signora," said one of the men, "the Corporal will know best how to manage. We must report to him."

"And we have no call," added the other, "to say anything to anybody else whatsoever! And, Signora, we are not the men to do it. So you had better make haste home; and slip quietly to bed. You have no need to fasten the door; we shall come down the hill at leisure; and we will fasten it; and if anybody hears it, why we have been out patrolling: and that is all about it."

Giulia had sufficient consciousness of her present position to be aware that what the soldier said was true and considerate. But she felt too bitterly the anguish they were causing her, and looked upon them too much as Beppo's enemies, for it to be possible to her to enter into amicable

communication with them. She got up from the ground, therefore, without any assistance from either of the men;—for with the instinctive delicacy and appreciation of the æsthetics of the situation, which is so characteristic of Italians, they did not put out a hand to touch her;—and merely saying, “I will go home,” turned to walk down the hill, with, perhaps, at that instant, the sorest and heaviest heart in all Italy, lying like a lump of ice in her bosom.



BOOK IV.

AT THE PASSO DI FURLO.

CHAPTER I.

GIULIA'S NIGHT JOURNEY.

GIULIA walked down the well-known path to Bella Luce, she passed the half-way tree in perfect safety,—for there was no Beppo in the path to stop her passage now!—and slunk up-stairs into her little chamber, undressed herself and got into bed; and the next morning, not having closed an eye during the intervening hours, she rose at the usual hour, and set to work on her wonted employment. But her mind rendered no account to itself of her occupation in all these things. She was only conscious of moving to and fro under such an overwhelming pressure of calamity and grief as seemed to have stunned her.

She had betrayed Beppo to his enemies, and had done so under circumstances which must lead him to attribute her conduct to motives that it was agony to her to contemplate. Death appeared to her to be the only possible escape from a situation too dreadful to be borne. And, oh ! how happily, how gratefully would she have closed her eyes with the knowledge that she should never open them more. If only Beppo could have been made to know that she had died to make it evident to him that he had been everything to her, and Corporal Tenda nothing, with what joy and gladness would she have met death !

But for all this it never entered into her head to commit suicide. With a quarter of the strength of despair and amount of motive to actuate her, a French girl would have taken her pan of charcoal as naturally and unhesitatingly as an Italian girl kneels to the Madonna ! Under a less amount of misery many an English girl has taken the fatal leap from the bridge parapet into the darksome pool below ! And yet the mind of the English girl has been used to dwell on thoughts of the invisible, on fears and awful doubts respecting that unknown world, to which she rushes in her hopelessness, which have never been

present to the mind of the Italian. And it was not high religious principle, or even overpowering religious fear, that prevented Giulia from turning her thoughts towards suicide. She was religiously ignorant, to a degree scarcely credible even to those most acquainted with our own uneducated classes. And though her church deems self-murder as one, at least, of the most irremediable of sins, she had received no teaching upon that subject. And in truth an Italian pastor might be excused for thinking that to preach against suicide was not one of the most necessary parts of his duty. No! it was not religious principle which prevented Giulia from even turning her thoughts towards that most desperate of all remedies for human sorrows. It was because it was not in her nature to do so. It never occurred to her among the possibilities of the case.

Italians very rarely commit suicide. Of the rustic population of the fields, it may probably be said that they never do so! Such a case is hardly upon record. So true it is that human conduct in such matters is ruled more by hereditary tendency and the natural idiosyncrasies of race, than by any other order of causes!

It was the morning after her unfortunate

expedition to the old tower at Santa Lucia, about ten o'clock in the forenoon; the farmer and his son were in the fields, and *la padrona* was engaged in household affairs up-stairs. Giulia was busy in the kitchen, mechanically going through her accustomed round of little duties, when Corporal Tenda came into the room. It was the first time that Giulia and he had been alone together since he had been at Bella Luce. For it had been the object of both of them to avoid such meetings.

"You will excuse me, I hope, for intruding on you, Signora," said the Corporal, saluting her very gravely, and with the same military flourish of the arm, that he would have used to the colonel of the regiment; "you will do me the justice to admit that since I have been here I have not yielded to the temptation of conversing with you."

"You have been very kind, Signor Caporale," said Giulia, sighing deeply, "but everything is against me; and now"

"Pardon me for interrupting you, Signora! And permit me to say a few words to you. Captain Brilli, I believe, explained to you the nature of my feelings on learning that the

happiness I had been presumptuous enough to hope for, was out of my reach. He made you understand, I hope, that your happiness is the first consideration I have in the world; and that if, as it seems, that can be promoted only by aiming at the welfare of your cousin, then the welfare of your cousin becomes a matter of paramount interest to me."

"Indeed, indeed, Signor Caporale, I am very grateful to you; but"

"If you will forgive me for again interrupting you, Signora, and will condescend to listen to what I have to say, I shall the sooner be able to disembarass you of my presence. I say that I am very desirous for the welfare of Signor Beppo. It was with that view that I begged Captain Brilli to open your eyes to the real nature of his position as a deserter. If you had any doubt about the correctness of that information, neither you nor any one else can have any doubts upon the subject any longer. For the proclamations stating all the liabilities and the penalties are now out, and are posted all over the country. There is a copy on the door of the Court-house up at Santa Lucia. It is perfectly clear, that there is no way of avoiding absolute ruin and destruction except timely

submission. Even if he could hope permanently to elude the pursuit of the troops and the police, what sort of a life is that of a bandit?—and for such a man as Signor Beppo! Be sure, therefore, that the chance which has led to the certainty of his capture, when he comes up to the tower yonder is the best thing that could happen to him. Not the best thing, however! For the best thing would be that he should surrender voluntarily. And I had hoped that you might possibly have induced him to do so!”

“But I intended to try hard to do so! I did write to him, Signor Caporale, begging him all I could to come back. I should have said everything I could think of to make him come in, when I saw him at the tower. Oh! Signor Caporale; why not let me try? Why not let me meet him?” said Giulia, clasping her hands, as a sudden ray of hope darted into her mind; “why not let me meet him alone, and try to persuade him?”

“It would be against orders, against duty, Signora! I would not do it to save my neck from the halter. But I am not sure.... not sure,” he added, looking into her tearful eyes, “that I should not do it to merit your gratitude,

if it had been possible! Happily for me, it is not possible. You forget, Signora, that it was not I who discovered the secret of your appointment with Signor Beppo; but two of my men. Even if I were to be willing to commit this breach of duty, I could not; for the men know as well as I that it is our duty to take the defaulter at all hazards, and by every means. Signor Beppo must be taken on Sunday evening;—there is no help for it. My business was only to point out for your consolation, that it is in truth the best thing that could happen to him; and just to say that you may depend on me to make it clear to him, that his capture is not due to any betrayal of him in any way.”

“Beppo will never, never believe it; he thinks——” but there was some feeling at Giulia’s heart, sore and bleeding as it was, that prevented her from going on to demonstrate what it was that Beppo thought which would make him proof against the Corporal’s eloquence.

“I hope he will be more reasonable!” said the Corporal. “And now, Signora, I must bid you farewell. I little thought when I last did so, that I should see you again here, and under such circumstances. I shall not intrude upon your

privacy again ; and besides, you are aware, of course, that the capture of your cousin puts an end to our unwelcome stay here. It will be our duty to march with him at once that same evening to Fano. May the time come, Signora, when we may meet hereafter under happier circumstances ! Addio, Signora !”

“Addio, Signor Caporale ! I am grateful to you for much kindness !”

“Farewell ! Signora Giulia !” said the Corporal, in the act of leaving the kitchen.

“Oh ! Signor Caporale !” said Giulia, suddenly calling after him ; “will anything very bad be done to Beppo for going away ?”

“Oh, no ! They don’t want to be severe with the men. They know, between ourselves, Signora,” he continued, dropping his voice as he spoke, with the true Italian feeling that he was approaching a dangerous subject, “they know that it is the priests that are really to blame more than the poor fellows who take to the hills. No ! they won’t do much. Only let him buckle-to with a good will, and make a good soldier, and all will soon be forgotten, and he will be made a corporal in no time. And you won’t like him any the worse when he comes back a smart

soldier, Signora Giulia!" said the Corporal, with a somewhat rueful smile; "I shall tell him that, Signora! Good-bye!"

"No! no! you must not tell him that—at least not from me!" said Giulia, very eagerly; but the Corporal was already gone! And it may be doubted whether she was very anxious to prevent the little man from using any means that such a consideration might supply towards reconciling Beppo to his fate,—if it must indeed come to be his fate.

But there were yet two nights and two days before that fate was to be consummated in the manner Corporal Tenda and his men contemplated. It was a Friday on which the above conversation had taken place. There was, therefore, the Friday night, all the day of Saturday, the Saturday night, and the whole of the day on Sunday, before the time fixed for his coming to the tryste at the old tower.

And during all this time Giulia had to meditate upon the coming catastrophe! It was in vain that she persuaded herself of the truth of the Corporal's representations, that to be captured and taken off by force to serve his time in the army was all for his advantage. Giulia, if not

altogether imbued herself with the genuine *contadino* horror for the service,—for her views and feelings had been a good deal modified and enlarged in this respect by her residence in the city, and by her association there with military men, and by the conversations which she had sometimes partaken in, but had oftener listened to;—nevertheless, was quite *contadina* enough to be well aware of the feeling with which Beppo, like all his class, regarded service in the army. Then again, she put very little faith in the good result of any of those promised representations of the Corporal, to the effect that the capture was effected by no fault or participation of hers. She knew well what Beppo's first feeling on the subject would be! She was too well aware how all that he had seen in Fano would appear to his mind to be confirmation strong as Holy Writ of all his new suspicions. She pictured to herself the bitter scorn with which he would listen to assurances, which would have the effect to him of having been concerted between her and her lover, for the purpose of blinding and making a fool of him. She saw but too clearly how the circumstances of the matter must appear to him, how they would carry with them all the

weight and authority of indubitable facts, while the explanations which were to follow them would come halting after with the weakness of mere excuses. And bearing in mind, too, Beppo's natural feeling towards the person who was to be the bearer of those excuses, she dared not flatter herself that any good could come of them. In short, by the time she had spent most part of the ensuing night—the Friday night, that is—in meditating on the matter in the silence of the night hours, the result was, that any good effect which the representations of the Corporal might have had on her mind at the moment, was altogether obliterated.

And during the whole of that day, the Saturday, the hourly drawing near of the consummation which was for evermore to brand her as false beyond all precedent of falseness, infamous beyond all imagined infamy, was never for a moment absent from her mind. But by the time the Ave Maria had come, she had determined on a course of action.

It was very doubtful whether the effort she purposed making would be of any avail; but at least her intention involved self-sacrifice; and action, with however desperate a hope, was pre-

ferable to hopeless, agonised waiting in inaction for the catastrophe.

The night came. The farmer and Carlo came home to their supper; but there were only three of the soldiers to sup with them. Giulia had not seen the Corporal since her conversation with him in the morning. And now he and one of the men were absent at the supper-time. But there was nothing unusual in this. Two, or more, of the party were often absent, sometimes all night, patrolling the neighbourhood, or marching hither and thither in obedience to information furnished them—in all probability intentionally false information in the majority of cases—of the whereabouts of some one or other of the contumacious conscripts.

As soon as the supper was over the soldiers went to their sleeping quarters in the room by the side of the kitchen; and very soon afterwards the members of the family went also to their chambers. Giulia also went to hers, and bolted the door of it as soon as she had entered. Then after making one or two small changes in her dress, and securing a small supply of bread, which she had previously carried to her room, in a handkerchief, knotted so as to serve the pur-

pose of a wallet, she stepped to the window, and after straining her eyes into the night to see, and her ears to hear, whether all was quiet, she placed a chair by the side of the window-sill, and by its help stepped with a light and unhesitating foot on to a ladder, which, a few minutes before supper, she had secretly carried round to the back of the house, on which the window of her room opened.

The last time she had secretly left the house her motions had been spied, in consequence of her passing to the kitchen-door by the door of the chamber in which the soldiers were sleeping. This time she was determined to avoid that danger.

She descended the ladder swiftly and surely ;—the height was not great ;—and on reaching the ground, she started, without losing a moment in any further listenings, on the path which led to the village.

And what was the purpose of her night-tide expedition this time ? It was simply to undo the mischief she had so unwillingly done, by preventing Beppo from coming to the trysting-place, where capture awaited him. It was but a slender hope she had of being able to effect her purpose.

She knew nothing of the locality of the place where he was hiding. She had never before in her life heard of *Santa Maria della Valle d' Abisso*. But the messenger had said that he came from Piobico. It was probable, therefore, that Beppo would be coming from that direction. And she had a general idea of the whereabouts of Piobico. It so happened that she knew one must go by the Passo del Furlo to go to Piobico. And she had once been through the Furlo pass, and knew the way to it. She must go by the little paved lanes among the hills at the back of the village into the valley of the Metauro; and then she had only to follow the high road, through Fossombrone, and then away, away many a mile, but always by the high road. So that, once in the great valley of the river, there was no danger of missing her road. And when she was at a distance from home, there would be no difficulty in asking the way to Piobico.

But Giulia's calculation was, that she should not be obliged to go all the way to the place of Beppo's retreat. He was to reach the old tower at the back of the churchyard a couple of hours after the Ave Maria on the Sunday evening,—about twenty hours, that is to say, or a little more,

from the time of her departure from Bella Luce. She hoped, therefore, that at the end of about ten hours' walk, early on the Sunday morning, she should meet him on his road, and so give him ample warning of his danger. Then, indeed, she would urge on him all that the Corporal had said; and if possible, induce him to surrender himself voluntarily to the authorities at Fano. The Corporal himself had said that that would be the best thing for him of all.

It never entered, it will be observed, into Giulia's calculations, that a person coming from Piobico to Santa Lucia might travel by any other route than by the high road! Poor Giulia! She had always heard all her life, that when people wanted to go to any place, they went along the road till they came to it, and no possible other course of proceeding presented itself to her imagination. She purposed going through the Pass of Furlo, which was the part of the road that she best remembered,—very naturally, for it is a very remarkable place. But we know that the priest had especially cautioned Beppo not to pass on any occasion by that route!

Giulia sped along the path to the village, with her wallet of bread slung behind her shoulders,

a precaution which was rendered necessary by her absolute lack of money, the entirety of her moneyed possessions having been, as we saw, expended on the messenger who had brought the letter that had caused so much trouble.

She sped along the path, reached the village, where all the population had gone to bed two hours or more ago,—reached the *cura*, at the windows of which she glanced suspiciously;—but there was no light in them;—reached the church; and the churchyard behind it; and the foot of the old ruined tower by which the road passed that was to take her down through one or two other villages into the valley of the Metauro.

She had looked at the *cura* suspiciously as she passed; but she cast no glance of doubt or misgiving on the old half-ruined brick tower. Nobody lived in that save the owls up in the ivy that clustered around its top.

Nevertheless, there were two shrewd eyes, which belonged to no such biped, looking out from that ivy at her as she passed.



CHAPTER II.

THE TWO OUTLAWS.

THE "one from Piobico," who took Giulia's letter to Beppo, had also taken back with him one from the priest, in answer to the communication he had brought from the fugitive. The purpose of Beppo's letter to the priest was to inquire whether any and what measures were being taken by the authorities to obtain possession of the contumacious men; and to ask when it was probable that he would be able to return to Bella Luce. And the answer to this application by the priest contained statements directly opposed to those of Giulia's letter. She assured him that there would be no coming back save after making submission, and undergoing the appointed time of service; that there was no alternative between this and the

indefinitely prolonged life of an outlaw and bandit. The priest, on the contrary, repeated his former assertions, that shortly,—not quite yet, but very soon—the soldiers would have left the country, the whole matter would have blown over, and he would be able to return freely.

Of these so diametrically opposed accounts, Beppo was not unnaturally disposed to credit that of the priest. He spoke with authority; it was to be supposed that he must know what he was talking about,—he was the priest. Nothing was more likely, on the other hand, than that Giulia should have been mistaken, and especially, if it was to be supposed, as too probably he must suppose, that her information on the subject was obtained from the military. Why, of course they would say that every kind of infamy and destruction would fall on those who declined to enter their ranks. The perusal of her letter, therefore, did not accomplish anything towards the object Giulia had so earnestly in view when writing it. It did not in any degree succeed in persuading Beppo to return, and put himself on good terms with the law.

But it did produce a great effect upon him. He questioned and cross-questioned the

messenger respecting every particular of his interview with Giulia, and was very much affected by the account of the expenditure of her entire money means upon the despatch of the letter. This involved an argument of earnestness and sincerity which very speakingly appealed to the *contadino* mind. Then the messenger related to him, how the lady had, though very shy and modest about it, admitted to him that she was a particular friend of his, and how, when he (the messenger) had cautioned her about not revealing to any one the place of Beppo's retreat, she had said, "she would not do him any injury for all the world."

Beppo insisted again and again on having the very words she had used repeated to him, and meditated on the exact and precise signification of every word with a patience and minuteness of examination which would have done honour to a learned German commentator. He was moved to tears by the relation of how she had declared that the reserved half of the sum of *la Dóssi's* wages was "all the money she had in the world;" and how she had been willing to risk putting that all into a hole in a wall, whence it might with the greatest ease have been stolen, for the sake of

having a letter from him. These were proofs of interest which it was impossible to doubt.

But then his mind went back to that last horrible time of seeing her in the street of Fano with Lisa, when he had accused her to her face of her falseness and faithlessness, and she had stood by uttering no word in her justification, and to all appearance caring nothing about either him or his accusations. And then again, that terrible and never-to-be-forgotten day in the Palazzo Bollandini at Fano, when he had seen her and that infamous man together, when they had paraded their intimacy before him, and joined in throwing ridicule upon him,—her relative and life-long friend, at least, if nothing else.

What was he to think? what to believe? Amid these distracting and insoluble doubts one thing only was clear to him, that he would give anything in the world to see her once more. It seemed to him as if he would then be able at once to blow aside all these contradictions and obscurities, and ascertain the truth if he could but see her.

So he had written the words which we know that Giulia had duly though so unfortunately found in the appointed hiding-place, and had

determined at all hazards to have a meeting with her. His purpose was to start on the Saturday morning, follow the same route across the mountains which he had travelled in coming to his place of refuge, and so arrive at the ruined tower behind the churchyard on the Sunday evening.

But a circumstance occurred which had the effect of changing his plans.

It has been mentioned that one other man from Santa Lucia besides himself had drawn a bad number, and that Don Evandro had succeeded in inducing him also to take to the hills; though he had not seen fit to join him to Beppo in the arrangements he had made for the safety of the latter.

This man, who had no very evident or assured means of subsistence, except such as he could obtain from his own family, or from the charity of the inhabitants of his own village, had, though absenting himself from his home, been lurking in the neighbourhood of Santa Lucia; and continued to do so till the arrival of Corporal Tenda and his men at Bella Luce made it too dangerous for him to remain so near at hand any longer. Don Evandro, however, in insisting on the man's departure from a district where he would be sure

to be captured, found it impossible to send him into one where, as he said, he should be sure to be starved, without some assurance that such a fate should not happen to him. He had accordingly given him a letter to a brother priest who held a small benefice in an out-of-the-way part of the country above the little hill town of Cagli, which is situated near the eastern extremity of that wild district called Monte Nerone, under the northern slopes of which stood the obscure little monastery in which Beppo had found an asylum.

The correspondent to whom Don Evandro had written, was requested by him not to give an asylum to the poor fugitive; for it has been stated, that he was not a man on whom much dependence could be placed in any way, but simply not to let him starve. Being thus supplied with the means of keeping body and soul together, and at the same time warned that he must not remain in the village, nor among the neighbouring farms, he wandered up to the solitary moorlands of Monte Nerone, and intending to descend in the direction of Cagli, missed his way, and came down upon the valley in which the monastery of Santa Maria della Valle di Abisso is ensconced.

It so happened that Beppo, dreadfully hard pressed to get through the days of enforced idleness in the society of the half-dozen friars, his hosts, had rambled up the hill to the ruined castle which has been mentioned, when the reader was first introduced to the singularly sombre little Valle di Abisso; and there he and his fellow fugitive from Santa Lucia fell in with each other, on the Friday before the Saturday on which he was to start for Santa Lucia.

This man had never been even an acquaintance of Beppo at home, further than as the members of such little communities are all known to each other. But on the same principle as that by virtue of which misfortune is said to make a man accustomed to strange bedfellows, the two Santa Lucia fugitives met as fellows.

"These old stones would make a famous hiding-place," said the stranger, after the two men had expressed their surprise at the unexpected meeting, and detailed the separate histories of their flight; "and for what I can see, it is like to come to that before long!"

"Before long I hope to be at home again at Bella Luce!" said Beppo.

"What, by paying?" said the other; "yes, that's all very well for the like of you!"

"No, my father does not think it right to pay for a substitute—(the Santa Lucia man, who knew old Farmer Paolo, grinned)—but the search for the missing men will soon be over."

"Soon be over! Who told you that?"

"Why, his reverence the Curato, to be sure! Did he not tell you the same?"

"Ay! but one thing is certain; either he knew nothing about it, or else he chose to say one thing when he knew another. No, Signor Beppo, you won't go home again by reason of the search being over!"

"Why, what do you know about it, I should like to know?—you to know better than his reverence!"

"Not I only. Any man may know better now, who can read. There are the papers stuck up all over the country."

"What papers? What do you mean, Niccoló?"
That was the stranger's name.

"What do I mean? Why, hav'n't you seen any of them—the proclamation papers! Why, you can't go into a village, nor to a house scarcely, where they are not stuck up. The men who

have gone out are to be just the same as bandits and brigands. They lose all civil rights. They are to be hunted through the country till found. And there is a certain time allowed for giving themselves up. No, no, Signor Beppo, there's no going home again !”

A cold perspiration settled on Beppo's brow as he heard him. He had never supposed that he was making himself a criminal and infamous in the eye of the civil law, or that the consequences of his escape would be other than temporary. Giulia's information was correct, then ! There was abundant reason in all she had said to urge him to return. Let her information come from what source it might, it seemed evidently to be given him with a view to his advantage. And yet the last communication from Don Evandro, brought back by the messenger who had carried Giulia's letter, had still urged him to remain in concealment at Santa Maria della Valle di Abisso, and had still represented his exile from home as merely temporary. Yet, surely, if he had no other means of knowing the truth, the priest must have seen these proclamations !

“If these papers are stuck up everywhere,” said Beppo, as these thoughts passed through

his mind, "I suppose there must be some at Santa Lucia, as well as everywhere else?"

"*Altro!* There's more than one of them there! They were stuck up before the soldiers came. I saw 'em myself; for I was there after they came, till his reverence told me that if I showed my face at Santa Lucia again as long as the soldiers were there, he would give me up!"

"Soldiers at Santa Lucia!" said Beppo, in consternation.

"What, don't you know? Is it possible! No, the soldiers are not at Santa Lucia;—not in the village at least;—for they are at Bella Luce!"

"What!" cried Beppo, looking as if the speaker had given him a violent blow. "What do you say! Soldiers at Bella Luce! Soldiers in my father's house! You must be dreaming,—or joking!"

"Not a bit one more than the other, Signor Beppo," returned Niccoló; "and it's no matter for joking either. Yes, in your father's house! A corporal and four men, to lodge and feed! They say old Signor Paolo is half out of his mind about it, and no wonder!"

"In the house!" exclaimed Beppo, to whom

the idea seemed yet too monstrous to be realisable or credible.

"Yes, living and sleeping in the house! that's one of the ways they've got to drive the men to come in and give themselves up, you see. If you don't come, says they, we put so many soldiers on you to eat your family out of house and home till you do, says they. That's their dodge."

"How many men did you say there are at Bella Luce?" asked Beppo.

"There's a corporal of Bersaglieri and four men," said Niccoló; "I saw 'em. They little thought as they were going up the hill to Bella Luce, that one of the men they wanted was looking at 'em, not three yards off, from behind your father's barn."

"A corporal of Bersaglieri!" said Beppo; while a vague idea of the possibility that it might be *the* Corporal, sent all the blood in his body to his head.

"Yes; a corporal of Bersaglieri, a smart, active-looking little chap! They are most of them little bits of men, I marked," said the large-limbed Romagnole. "I heard his name in the village afterwards. They called him Corporal Tenda."

Beppo was struck absolutely speechless. He stood staring at the man with distended eyes and open mouth, struggling for breath to speak.

"That man at Bella Luce!" he said, in a voice so changed that Niccoló stared at him with surprise. "Living in the house! Corporal Tenda living in my father's house! And Giu—! Not Corporal Tenda!"

"Yes, Corporal Tenda! I remember the queer, outlandish-sounding name well enough. Why not Corporal Tenda? What matters one more than another? He don't eat more than another man."

But Beppo had thrown himself on the ground, and was sitting, holding his forehead in his hands, and swaying his body to and fro as if he was in violent bodily pain.

"Ah! I see," said Niccoló, after staring at him in much surprise for a while; "I see where it is, now! Yes, I remember. I did hear some talk in the village, that that Corporal chap was the man that had been making up to the Signora Giulia, and that she was so sweet upon down in the city. Yes, yes! I understand it all now. Yes; that's a very nasty pinch, it must be owned. They've got the halter on your throttle there, Signor Beppo, sure enough!"

But Beppo could only answer by groaning aloud, as he still sat swaying himself in the intensity of his agony.

An Italian does not conceive that there is anything ridiculous in suffering caused by unfortunate or unrequited love, or that it becomes him in any way to disavow or conceal the fact. Niccoló was not a particularly sympathetic individual, nor had he any special regard or liking for Beppo Vanni; but he pitied him for the pain he was undergoing, as naturally as he would have pitied him if he had been suffering from the toothache. One agony seemed to him just as real and as pitiable as the other.

"It is a very hard case; a veritable *male-dizione del cielo*, Signor Beppo! that must be admitted," he said, in a sympathising voice. "What shall you do? I think that such a chance would drive me home at all hazards."

"It will do just the contrary to me," said Beppo, getting up, and looking as if the blow he had suffered had done the work of a long illness on his features. "I had meant to go to Santa Lucia to-morrow; but there is nothing there now that I care to see, or ever shall care to see again."

"What shall you do, then, Signor Beppo?" said Niccoló.

"I don't know; I don't care. I don't care what becomes of me! Give myself up, perhaps. Good-bye, Niccoló! I'm glad I chanced to meet you. I'm glad to have learned the truth. Good-bye!"

And so saying he turned on his heel, and began going down among the woods towards the monastery, leaving Niccoló gazing after him.

And that was how it came to pass that Beppo did not start for Bella Luce as he had intended on the Saturday morning.



CHAPTER III.

THE FURLO PASS.

BEPPO made his way slowly down through the thick wood, towards the monastery, heedless of his steps, and heedless of everything save the dull dead sense of overwhelming misery, which made everything else indifferent to him. Thus descending the steep hill-side, mainly because it was mechanically easier than to ascend, he came to the top of the precipice, immediately overhanging the buildings of the monastery, and had nearly fallen over. But he saved himself with the instinct of self-preservation, by catching hold of the slender stem of a young chestnut; and smiling bitterly the next moment at the thought that it would have been better for him to have fallen, he made his way down to the spot where the wall of rock, which

hedged round the little territory of the friars, completing its semicircle, fell to the brink of the stream. There, at the extreme verge of the damp and mournful-looking meadow, he seated himself on the trunk of a fallen tree, and set to work, if possible, to think.

Since receiving that letter from Giulia he had been suffering hope once more to grow up in his heart; fool, miserable fool that he was. Of course it was all arranged. They had procured, no doubt by the influence of that Captain Brillì, that the Corporal should be sent to Bella Luce. There was no talk of soldiers coming to Bella Luce till after Giulia had returned to it. And he—oh! threefold ass and dupe that he was—he had laboured and planned to procure her return thither. And this anxiety to induce him to give himself up? No doubt it was plotted between her and the military authorities;—he was to be the price, very likely, of permission for the Corporal to marry her. To be sure; the thing was clear. He had been told enough of the efforts that the officers who had the management of the conscription were making to get the men, especially the more desirable materials for soldiers, by hook or by crook! Yes, it was as

clear as daylight. If you can induce him to deliver himself up there shall be a permission, very sparingly granted in the Italian army, for the Corporal of Bersaglieri to marry.

Give himself up! Perhaps it was the best thing he could do. Go for a soldier, and find a soldier's death. But he would not be the price paid for the success of her shameless, scandalous inconstancy and falsehood. No! He would go direct to Fano. He would never return to Bella Luce again. He would go and make his submission to the superior authorities, and take care that it was known that his worthless cousin had nothing to do in the matter.

And then the evening breeze brought to his ears the sound of the friars in the neighbouring little chapel, bawling their vesper psalms. And he thought that he could find it in his heart to take his place among them, gird the cord around his loins, and never go out of this darksome valley more. They were racked by no pangs of unrequited love, of that most miserable and most hopeless of all loves, the love which has been given, alas! all too irrevocably, to a heartless and unworthy woman!

He dragged himself, when the shutting-up hour

came, to the miserable little dilapidated cell which had been assigned to him, and the night passed in going again and again over the same round of wretchedness. Then came the necessity of meeting another day, of facing the sunlight, so gladdening and glorious for the light of heart, so floutingly garish and insulting to those that mourn.

But as the sun rose high into the heaven, and the strong fierce light was poured over all things, a certain change began to be operated in the tone of his feelings. A fierce and burning indignation at the wickedness of which he had been the victim, began to take the ascendant over the less self-asserting attitude of mind that, during the hours of darkness, had prompted him to desire only annihilation of self-consciousness,—only to slink away into some unseen corner like a stricken stag, — to forget everything and be forgotten.

No ! it was not just ; it was not righteous ! Infamy and falsehood should not have their triumph, at least, without having heard once the truth. The words of indignant reproof, of withering scorn, of most just denunciation, were burning on his tongue. He felt that he must speak them !

Once, only once, before he should go away, his eyes never more to look on her, nor hers on him, once yet again he must speak! She could not fail to feel in some measure the infinite depth of infamy to which she had fallen, as he felt he could speak it to her. She could not but cower before his righteous scorn.

“Yes! he would go. He would speak those rightful words, and then . . . !”

But it was not quickly as it has been related here, that his mind came to this point. Gradually, as he kept heaping coals of fire on his indignation, by feeding his imagination with fresh pictures of Giulia's falseness,—of her hideous fickleness to him, and, yet more maddening, of her happy loves with another,—gradually his fury came to that white heat at which speech became an imperious necessity to him.

But by that time the day was waning. Little more than twenty-four hours remained before the time he had named for the meeting at the foot of the ruined tower by the churchyard; very little more than twenty-four hours! and in that time, let him make what speed he would, let hot indignation goad him as it might, he knew that it was impossible for him to reach the trysting-place

by the hour named, if he were to travel by the path over the mountains.

It was still possible, however, to do it if he travelled by the direct road through the Furlo pass, instead of making that large circuit. It was true that the priest had enjoined him by no means to use that route upon any occasion. But the desire that had come upon him of keeping the tryst he had made at the ruined tower, and there once for all pouring out all the pent-up grief and rage that were in his heart, was too strong to admit of being frustrated by such a difficulty. And, besides, as to the chances of capture by the patrolling parties of soldiers, he was quite reckless.

So it came to pass that Beppo was starting from Santa Maria della Valle di Abisso a few hours only sooner than Giulia was setting out from Bella Luce ; and that he also was intending to travel by the Furlo pass.

He had none of the difficulties to meet and precautions to take, which had been necessary to Giulia in starting on her expedition. But he thought it due to his hosts to tell them that he should not be at the monastery that night, for that he purposed making an excursion to see

how matters were going on—whether there were any parties of military in the neighbourhood, or any reason to fear that Santa Maria della Valle might be visited by them.

The Superior, when he mentioned his purpose, sought to deter him from it,—pointing out that it was incurring a risk for nothing,—that any such information as he required might be much more easily and safely obtained by one of the brotherhood than by him.

“Brother Simone is going on circuit to-morrow morning, my son,” said the Superior; “he is a discreet and prudent man, and not without intelligence in the affairs of the world. Let him make the inquiries you wish. He would be able to do it without incurring any suspicion. And I have very little doubt that he could obtain a copy of the proclamation you are so desirous of seeing, and bring it home with him.”

“I think, father, that I should prefer ascertaining the state of things myself. I will be very cautious. And something prompts me to go out to-night. I cannot rest in peace here till to-morrow morning.”

“Not till to-morrow morning, my son! Not one night! What would it be if you had to

remain here, without prospect of change, every night and every morning till the sun set behind yon mountain for the last time that your eyes were ever to see it? The truth is, that the still convent life has in these few days been so heavy to you, that from sheer restlessness you must needs go forth into the world! Well, go, my son! Should anything unfortunate occur, you will have the justice to let his reverence the curato of Santa Lucia know that we were not to blame in the matter!"

"Assuredly, father. Trust me, no blame shall rest upon you for my fault. But I do not think that I am going into any danger."

"Nevertheless, my son, it is well to be prepared against it. And by a strange chance it so happens that I am able to give you the means of being so. We are men of peace here, and have no arms of offence, or even of defence! But I will give you a line, which you shall give in passing to a worthy man at Piobico, who will furnish you with the means of keeping violence at a distance."

The Superior stepped into his cell, and in a minute or two came out with a note, sealed, and addressed to a person in the adjacent little town.

"Take this, my son, and avail yourself of it. You may be thankful for the precaution before you get back to Santa Maria! And if you are determined to go, good night, and good luck to you!"

Beppo took the note, thanked the Superior for his kindness, and was punted across the stream by one of the brethren. The Superior, looking after him, muttered to himself, "A shot fired is useful to the right cause any way! If the soldier is killed, the heretic king loses a man, and is shown that the country is disaffected. If the peasant is shot, there is the outcry against the government, and the odium!"

Beppo went down the path by the side of the stream to the little town of Piobico, almost at a run; for the work that was before him at the end of his journey was in his mind, and his angry heart was eager for it. He presented the billet, as he had been bidden, at Piobico, more from the life-long habit of doing submissively what he was told to do by any member of the dominant caste in his native land, than for any other reason. Yet it is as well, he thought to himself, to be on an equality with those who are out against me! The man to whom it was addressed, a

quiet enough looking small shopkeeper, asked no questions and made no remark ; but having read the note, desired Beppo to pass into a back apartment for a minute, and there put into his hands a musket and a sufficient quantity of ammunition for its immediate use.

“ Adieu, friend ! I wish you luck ! ” was all he said as Beppo left his house.

“ Adieu, and thanks ! ” said Beppo, and with the musket over his shoulder he strode off at a rapid pace through the darkness towards Aqualagna, at which point he would fall into the great high road which runs through the valley of the Cardigliano, and by the pass of Furlo. Nevertheless, it was nearly the morning Ave Maria before he came to that village ; and by the time he was approaching the pass, the day was breaking.

The pass of the Furlo consists of a tunnel, bored through the living limestone, at a point where the river Cardigliano, through whose valley the road has been previously running, enters a narrow passage between two precipitous walls of rock, which render all further progress impossible by any other means. The Roman legionary was a great road-maker ; but he was a pigmy at his

work compared to an English navy! And the greatest works of Roman road-making, which excited the wonder and admiration of the world for successive centuries, sink into absolute insignificance in comparison with the triumphs of modern science in preparing a way for the iron horse.

And the Furlo, celebrated for so many hundred years, is but a small and commonplace tunnel after all! Nevertheless, the position and surroundings of it are picturesque and striking. The walls of rock, through which a road-maker yet more puissant than even the English navy has riven a passage for the waters of the Cardigliano, are of a very respectable height, and of a good colour. The channel of the river is narrow, and yet the volume of water that rushes through it is at times very great; and the road, for some time before entering and after quitting the tunnel, is carried along a ledge of rock at a considerable height above it.

At the spot at which the road enters the tunnel on its way down the stream,—in the direction, therefore, in which Beppo was travelling,—there is a narrow ledge of rock on the face of the wall-like precipice, at nearly the same

altitude as the road, and accessible from it. To a traveller coming from that side it seems as if this ledge of rock might have been made available for carrying the road, and the necessity for boring the tunnel avoided. But the traveller coming in the other direction, from the lower ground and the Adriatic side, sees no such ledge when he enters the tunnel at his end. It comes, in fact, to a sudden stop between the two extremities of the tunnel, and offered, therefore, to the first engineers, when they were seeking a passage for their road, merely a baulk and deception.

A subsequent generation, however, has utilised this fraudulent ledge as far as it goes, by building on it a little chapel, and what seems, by the remains of it, to have been a dwelling for an officiating priest. I do not know, by-the-by, that there is any good reason for attributing the happy idea of turning this queerly-placed fragment of soil to such a purpose, to the men of a subsequent generation to that of the original makers of the road, though the ruined buildings now visible are assuredly the work of mediæval and not of Roman architects. But the former were as fond of chapels as the latter,—as firmly

persuaded of the desirability of erecting them on certain spots, and in certain localities; had the same ideas respecting the nature of the advantages to be derived from building them in such positions, and piety of a precisely similar calibre to prompt them to erect such buildings. There is every probability, therefore, that a fane dedicated to some Pagan deity existed on this ledge of rock, before the now crumbling walls of the lodging for a Christian saint and his officiating priest had appropriated the spot.

As the ruins now stand, entirely filling the narrow space, and hiding all beyond them from the eye of one approaching them from up the stream, it looks on that side as if a way might be found by entering them without passing through the tunnel;—a mere delusion; as at the back of the ruins is the sheer precipice, with the torrent seething and roaring far down beneath them.

Beppo had walked on sturdily all night, had passed through the village of Aqualagna a little before the dawn, and was approaching the entrance of the Furlo tunnel just as the sun was peeping over the tops of the hills, sufficiently to shed a grey cold light down in the ravine of the Cardigliano. He had been carrying his

loaded gun carelessly over his shoulder all night, but he now brought it in front of him, ready for use if need were; for the nature of the place, and the observations which the priest had made to him respecting the desirability of avoiding it, and the probability that soldiers would be on the look-out there for deserters if anywhere, occurred to him.

With ear and eye on the alert, therefore, he was on the point of entering the darkness of the tunnel, when he heard a voice that made him start, saluting the dawn by chanting the morning Ave Maria, as it was coming through the gallery in the opposite direction.

He started violently, held his breath, and bent his ear to listen. But though the voice as it came on could be heard plainly enough, the strange re-echoing of the vaulted arch, and the tricks played with the sounds by the unusual acoustic conditions of the tunnel, made it difficult to recognise it. Beppo sprang to the top of the low parapet wall which borders the road, and from that stepped on to the little space in front of the ruins of the chapel. As he so stood facing the ruins, the precipice and the river were on his right hand, and the road with the entrance

to the tunnel on his left. And there, with his musket on his arm, he awaited till the owner of the voice should emerge from the darkness. The voice came on, plaintively chanting its morning song to the Virgin, and it became certain that it was the voice of a woman. But, although some note had, when he first heard it, thrilled him with a recognition, which his ear seemed to have made without the participation of his mind, it was still so changed by the tunnel that he could not with any certainty recognise it.

Presently it came near, still continuing its chant, and, in the next minute, Giulia stepped into the grey light, plodding along with manifest weariness, but still pressing eagerly onward.

Beppo's surprise was so great that it nearly overmastered and replaced his indignation. What could be the meaning of it! She had evidently, like himself, been walking all the night; and it seemed impossible to doubt that her journey must, in some way or other, and for some purpose or other, have reference to himself. But for what conceivable object could she have chosen to have come thus far away from the spot where he had appointed to meet her? Not, as it seemed to him certain, with any view of falling in with him.

That could scarcely be, inasmuch as his being there at all arose from circumstances which even he himself could not have foretold a few hours ago. If she had had any communication with the priest, he would have told her that there was no chance of meeting him just where, by the unexpected effect of circumstances, she *had* met him. And again, without communication with the priest, she could have had, he thought, no knowledge of his whereabouts whatsoever. Nor could he suppose that she had been directed by the priest to the monastery of Santa Maria della Valle di Abisso, and was on her way thither; for he had told her in his letter, sent by the messenger, that he would be at the ruined tower at Santa Lucia that Sunday evening; and she could not, therefore, expect to find him at Santa Maria.

She came along the road, emerging from the tunnel into the light of the dawn, intent only on pursuing her way, and did not see him. In fact, it was hardly possible that she should see him unless she had turned her head so as to look backwards as she came out from the dark passage. Standing on the bit of ground that has been described, he was in fact behind her when she

stepped out from it. And she would have passed on without observing him if he had remained silent, for she was walking quickly, and manifestly anxious only to press onwards.

Beppo's first impulse was to fling himself into the road in front of her, and at her feet. But the thought of the next second reminded him that his present business with her was of a different kind; that he was there as an accuser and denouncer, and not as a lover.

"Giulia!" he cried, rather in the voice and tone of a judge arraigning a prisoner before him, than in one of passion or of tenderness.

She started so violently as almost to fall to the ground, yet her surprise was very far less than his had been; in fact, except the startling suddenness of the call from behind her, and the strangeness of the manner in which he spoke to her, she had no cause for surprise at all. She was travelling in the hope and expectation of meeting him; and if she had known anything about the distances of the places in question, she would have been expecting to meet him much about then and there.

He added no word to the one he had so sternly uttered, but remained standing, drawn up to his

full height, with his gun on his arm, glaring on her from the higher ground, about ten feet above the level of the road on which she stood.

"Oh, Beppo! thank God I have found you," she said, "I have been walking all night in the hope of finding you, to warn you . . . to warn you . . . you went on, out of breath with eagerness and anxiety—" "not to come to the tower in the church . . . There are soldiers at Santa Lucia . . ."

"In what house?" demanded he, sternly.

"In our house, . . . at Bella Luce."

"What soldiers?" he said, in the same stern tone.

"Bersaglieri!—an officer and four men."

"Who is the officer?" said Beppo, with concentrated fury, increased by what appeared to him her attempt at subterfuge and evasion.

"I don't know how it came about . . .," she began, hesitating and greatly distressed, "because she had had the slightest intention of concealing the fact from him, but because he perceived that he had already conceived suspicions which she would have given him no chance of disabuse him of; and because the information would have to reach him, if indeed it had not reached him already, in so unfortunate a manner, and one so calculated to confirm him in the

"You *do* know!" he said, interrupting her with stern harshness. "Who is the officer living with you at Bella Luce?"

"Living with me!—oh, Heaven, Beppo!" she said, with a sob.

"Who is the officer?" he said for the third time, with increasing harshness and even ferocity of manner.

"It is Corporal Tenda, Beppo. I came here to"

"Vile! shameless! perjured woman!" began he, in a slow, grating voice, with a *crescendo* weight of scorn on each word; but she interrupted him with an energy that broke through the violence of his invective.

"Beppo! Beppo! I must speak! You shall say what you will to me afterwards! I will bear it all! But there is no time to lose. Beppo, I have walked all night,—all night as fast as I could, but I am sure I have had somebody behind me all the time. I could see nobody when I stopped to listen, but from time to time I have heard steps, and I seemed to feel as if somebody was near me and following me. I am afraid the soldiers are on my track. Go back, Beppo! go back! make haste!"

"Feel as if he was near to you! Double—triple traitress! Yes, you have felt his nearness to you—his breath on your cheek. Faugh! loathsome creature! And now you are come to earn your reward and his by betraying me into his hands! Let him come on!"

"Oh, Beppo! oh, God! Beppo! For the holy Virgin's sake, don't say! don't think kill me! throw me into the river! I will jump in if you bid me! But go back! don't lose time! Hark! there are steps in the tunnel! They are running! They have heard us! Beppo! run!"

"Run where? You have managed it very well! Let your lover come and earn your hand! Let him come! And unless you want to make the next world as well as this a hell to me stand out of the way of this, yourself!" tapping the gun-barrel as he spoke the last words.

The steps coming rapidly through the tunnel were now heard close at hand, and Beppo retreated back across the little plot of ground in front of the ruined buildings on the ledge of rock, till he placed his back against the wall, and then examined the priming of his musket.

In the next instant the Corporal and one of his men emerged from the tunnel.

"We heard his voice," cried the former. "Let him surrender and all will be well. Signora Giulia, this has been the saddest night's work to me that I ever had to do. Signor Beppo," he called aloud, "I summon you to surrender!"

"And I tell you to take me, if you want me!" answered Beppo, whose voice made the two men first aware of his exact whereabouts. "Observe, I am armed!"

"I have had to do with armed men before now, Signor Beppo," returned the Corporal, quietly; "but then I was not so loth to do them a mischief as I am to hurt you; and that makes a difference. But I am going to take you, because it is my duty, and I can't help it. We are two to one; see!"

"You are three to one, you mean!" said Beppo, with a fierce sneer.

"Oh, Signor Beppo!" replied Tenda, "I should have scorned to say such a word as that, if I had been you. *La Signora Giulia* ——"

"If you mean to take me, come on!" shouted Beppo. "There stands the prize you are playing for. Surely you can't hesitate to come on and win it."

"What must be, must," said the Corporal,

giving a glance as he spoke at the priming of his own weapon, and springing up on the parapet wall, and then confronting Beppo, who kept his ground with his back to the ruins, about some ten paces from him. It was possible to enter the ruined building, and it might be practicable for a man engaged in escaping from the pursuit of another to dodge about among the fragments of walls of the chapel, and the miniature dwelling that had been attached to it. But there was no possibility of escaping from the little bit of land which juts out in the manner that has been described; unless, indeed, the possibility—so desperate as hardly to be considered a possibility—of throwing oneself from the ledge of rock into the boiling stream beneath be deemed such.

The little bit of ground which separated Beppo from the Corporal, and on which the ruined walls behind the former are built, will be understood, if the description of the locality has been successfully made intelligible to the reader, to be on the outside of the rock, through which the tunnel was bored, in such sort that a very short passage might have been bored from the chapel into the tunnel, which passage would, in that case, have entered the tunnel at right angles.

"If you advance a step, I fire!" cried Beppo.
"I have a right to fire in self-defence."

"Signor Beppo," said the Corporal, standing quite still, and holding the muzzle of his piece pointed upwards, while that of Beppo was levelled at him,—“Signor Beppo, I and my comrade are going to take you, because it is our bounden duty to do so;—not, God knows, because I have any wish or liking for the job; but I beg you to observe for your own sake, that if you shoot me, you will have to answer for murder done in resisting an officer in the execution of his duty, whereas if I should have the misfortune to shoot you, I shall be held to have done no more than my duty under the circumstances. And having warned you how the matter stands, I must do my duty.”

So saying, but without levelling his rifle, the Corporal made a stride forwards towards the deserter, and in the same instant Beppo fired, first one barrel, and in the next second the other barrel of his piece, both harmlessly, as was likely enough to be the case, even at ten paces distance, when the aim was that of a peasant, who had never fired a gun under such circumstances, or in a hurry before.

At the sound of the two shots, Giulia, who

was in the road at the entrance to the tunnel, screamed and put her hands before her eyes. And the Corporal, looking round at her for an instant, exclaimed, "No harm done yet; and there won't be any now, I hope."

Beppo heard the scream and the answer, and a bitter thought of her fear for the safety of her lover, and of his re-assuring reply to her, even then gave him an additional pang.

But as soon as ever he perceived the failure of his two shots, he dashed into the ruins, at the same moment that the Corporal—who was not aware of the impossibility of passing out at the back of them, and so rejoining the road below the tunnel—rushed forwards to secure him.

Beppo, however, who was acquainted with the locality, knew well that there were only two possibilities before him, either surrender, or the mad and desperate alternative of throwing himself down the precipice into the river. But reckless, maddened by passion and despair as he was, and determined only that the man he detested should not have the triumph and the praise, and most of all, as he had fancied in his jealousy, the reward of taking him, he did not hesitate an instant. Throwing down his gun in the ruins, he rushed,

while the Corporal was rapidly glancing round the chapel, which was the part of the building first entered from the little platform on which they had both been standing when the shots were fired, to a spot where a breach in the wall of what had been the priest's dwelling, opened sheer upon the top of the precipice.

Immediately beneath this, about half way down to the river, a depth of something more than twenty feet perhaps, the wall of rock jutted out over the stream, narrowing the distance across it by some eight or ten feet; and on the sort of promontory thus formed, where a deposit of soil had in the course of years accumulated, there had once grown a good-sized tree. Had it been there still, it would have very materially facilitated Beppo's enterprise. But it had long since decayed and fallen, and there was only a fragment of its rotting stump, nearly level with the rock from which it had sprung, remaining. Nevertheless, this stump supplied a certain amount of foot-hold on the promontory in question, making it possible for a human being to find a standing-place there. Possible, that is, if a man could have reached the spot in a quiet manner; but not such as that it should be pos-

sible for any man to jump perpendicularly down on it from a height of twenty feet, and there, in the utter absence of anything to catch hold of with the hands, remain stationary.

Nevertheless, without an instant's pause for either examination or reflection, Beppo jumped from the base of the broken wall above down on to the rotting stump, probably without having at all considered whether it was possible for him to remain there, or what step he should next take. On the other side of the river the rock was nearly as precipitous; but in consequence of the set of the current being to the side of the tunnel and the road, there was a little alluvial soil at the foot of the rocks by the margin of the water on the opposite bank; and in this foot or two of soil there was a growth of dwarfed alders and cistus bushes.

When he lighted quite unhurt on the rotting tree-stump, half way down the precipice on the other side, his body felt, even more quickly than his brain could reach the conviction, that no effort could enable him to remain there. He must either fall or make a new instantaneous spring. The former was certain, the latter only probable destruction. So, gathering all the vast,

though seldom-used strength of his large bony limbs for one supreme and desperate effort, he sprang right towards the bushes, and, though the leap would have at any other time, and under any other circumstances, appeared to him wholly preposterous and out of the question, lighted among them but little the worse for the adventure.

Of course all this was done and accomplished in a few seconds; and when Corporal Tenda, blundering on in his search through the ruins, came to the broken place in the wall from which Beppo had jumped, he could hardly believe his eyes, when he saw him safe on the other side of the Cardigliano.

"I thought you were going to take me, Signor Caporale?" panted Beppo. "Go and tell those who sent you, and her who brought you, that it is not so easy to take a Romagnole *contadino* who does not choose to be taken."

Tenda, on catching sight of him, had, in an instant, instinctively raised his rifle to his shoulder, and had his finger on the trigger; but after a moment of hesitation, he threw the muzzle up.

"It would be my duty to shoot you dead where you stand; and mind, when you join us you'll have a deal to learn, for we Bersaglieri don't

fire in the way you did just now. My duty, and nothing more nor less," he repeated; "but I can't do it. I *can't* do it, in the first place, for her sake, and in the second place, because it would be one part for duty and two parts for myself; and that would make murder of it. I shan't shoot you, let it be how it will."

"What! Won't that serve the turn with her as well as taking me? Fire away, Corporal; she will be just as much pleased, and I a deal better."

"Can't have the pleasure of serving you; I'm not going to do it, I tell you. Though for speaking in the way you do, you deserve it a deal better than you do the love of the prettiest and best girl that ever breathed. So now I shall leave you to get out of that hole you have jumped into the best way you can; and bid you good morning till the next time we meet, when I hope I may be able to knock a little sense into that hard head and jealous-mad heart of yours!"

So saying, the Corporal turned away, and going back into the road, told Giulia that Beppo had escaped safe and sound to the other side of the river by taking such a jump as no man ever took before; and that they had nothing for it but to

return by the way they had come, and hope for better luck another time.

He admitted that, fearing they might possibly miss their object by waiting till the time named in the note discovered by his comrade, he had determined on keeping watch at the ruined tower; and that on seeing her start on her walk the previous evening, he had felt no doubt at all that her purpose was to warn Beppo that he was waited for, and that the only way to lay hands on him therefore was to follow her, without letting her know that she was watched.

"And now, what does he think of me?" said Giulia, with a sob that seemed to burst her heart.

"And what will he think when he knows all, Signora? Think of that. He *shall* know all; trust me for that. I would not shoot him just now when I might have done it, and ought by rights to have done it, on purpose. If he don't think and feel that he is the happiest fellow in Christendom, and that no man was ever blessed by the love of such a girl before," said the Corporal, speaking with immense energy, "he must be a bad fellow,—and I don't think he *is* a bad fellow at bottom. Shall we have the honour of escorting you home, signora?"

"No, please, Signor Caporale; I must return alone as I came. I must indeed, please! I must get some rest before I can walk home. I should like to sleep a little. They will be very angry with me at home. Perhaps you will have the goodness, Signor Caporale, to say that I am coming home;—that you have seen me; and—and—perhaps, if you don't mind, the best thing you could say, would be to tell them that I went away secretly to try to warn Beppo that you were after him."

"That shall be it, signora. I don't mind owning that I have been beaten by a lady. We leave you, then, to come home at your leisure by yourself."

So the two soldiers set off on their return to Bella Luce, and Giulia was left alone, sitting on the bank by the road-side at the mouth of the tunnel.



CHAPTER IV.

ACROSS THE RIVER.

GIULIA was left, when the Corporal and his companion turned to go back to Bella Luce, sitting on the bank by the side of the road where it emerged from the tunnel of the Furlo, on the side farthest from the river. The Corporal had been rather unwilling to leave her there, not from any feeling that she had any need of protection, for there was nothing either strange or unusual or imprudent in a country girl such as Giulia traversing the country alone, although she was somewhat unusually far from home ; but he thought she must be very tired with her night's journey, and might probably need some rest before she could set out on her return. But he had felt that under the peculiar circumstances of the case, it might be better and

more agreeable to her that any aid she might need should come from anybody rather than from him. He had felt that she spoke very genuinely her real wish when she asked him to go and leave her to follow alone. He guessed, too, that she would most likely try to have some communication with Beppo across the river; and he was very conscious that if any good was to be done by any such conversation, it must not take place in his presence. He felt, too, that if it did become known to Beppo that he had returned to Bella Luce, leaving her there in his immediate neighbourhood, that fact alone would go far to mitigate Beppo's anger.

Nevertheless, if the Corporal had guessed how entirely poor Giulia's whole stock of strength and courage had been expended; and still more, if it had for an instant occurred to his mind that she had not a single *baiocco* in her pocket, he assuredly, despite the good reasons given above, would not have left her by the road-side.

In truth, for the first few minutes after the Corporal and his subordinate had disappeared into the darkness of the tunnel, Giulia, sitting on the bank, felt as if she was going to die. The fact was, that she was very near fainting, and for a

few minutes very genuinely thought that she was going to die. Her head swam round,—a cold perspiration covered her brow;—and she felt a horrible deadly sensation of sickness. In truth, the violent and painful emotion which she had undergone during the last quarter of an hour,—for the whole of the scene described in the last chapter could not have occupied a longer time,—coming after long fasting, and the great fatigue of her night's journey, had been too much for her.

She was still fasting; for though she had her loaf of bread still with her, she had not allowed herself time to eat any of it, or to rest; her only object during her forced night-march had been to press on, that she might be able to warn Beppo in time; and the steps behind her which she had heard from time to time throughout the night had kept her in a continued state of nervous anxiety, and had driven her to press onwards with all the speed she could make.

However, she did not faint. But for a short time all consideration of the circumstances of her present position gave way before the necessity of battling with the sensations of physical weakness.

Then after a little while she began to think, to recollect and realise all that she had seen and

heard during the last quarter of an hour. She put her hands up to her forehead, and pushing back all the abundance of raven black hair, and resting her head on the palms of her hands, and her elbows on her knees, she went over all the train of circumstances, from her buying the secret of Beppo's hiding-place from the Piobico man, to the issue of her endeavours in their present total miscarriage. Then, as her mind gradually found its way down to the immediate present, passing by the horrible, horrible reminiscence of Beppo's last words to her with as slight and rapid a glance as possible, she was conducted to the consideration of his present position. She had heard the Corporal bawling out to him something about getting out of the hole he had jumped into as best he might. What hole could he have jumped into? Had he got out? Might not he need assistance to do so? Was he not perhaps still somewhere very near her?

With these thoughts in her head, she dragged herself to her feet, and found to her great surprise that her head turned and swam so that she could with difficulty stand. However, in a few minutes this got better, and she was able to begin her search for Beppo, if indeed it was to be supposed that he was still in the immediate neighbourhood.

She got up on the parapet wall, and thence on to the grass-grown bit of the ledge of the rock in front of the ruined chapel ; then passed into the building, and looking round it, as the Corporal had done, saw Beppo's gun on the ground at the foot of one of the walls. Close by it was a door of communication with the part of the building which had been the priest's residence. Giulia passed through this, and wandering thence into a second little bit of a room saw the breach in the wall, which opened on the river and the precipice at the bottom of which the river was raging along through its narrow channel.

She approached the edge of the rock, on which the lowest stones only of the wall which had been built there remained in that part of it, and looked out on to the stream below her, and the opposite wall of rock on the other side of it. Her first impression was, that certainly no human being could have passed *that* way ! But as she cast her eyes directly down towards the river, mentally measuring the distance that separated the spot where she stood from it, she saw that part of the precipice where the rock jutted out, and saw the rotten stump of the tree which had grown there. It seemed to her impossible that

any man could have jumped from the top of the rock on to that small spot, twenty feet or more below it; and still more impossible, that any one could have passed from that spot by any means save falling into the river. Nevertheless, gazing down, she thought she could see the impression of feet on the soft matter of the decayed tree-stump. And carrying her eye thence across the ravine to the opposite margin of the stream, away down at the bottom she thought she saw a movement among the bushes there.

It was likely enough that some movement of her own on the edge of the precipice where she stood had caused a corresponding movement among the bushes below; for Beppo had been watching her from his covert among them ever since she had appeared at the breach in the wall.

In the next minute she caught a glimpse of his figure among the thick growth of alder and cistus bushes.

"Oh! Beppo!" she exclaimed, in an accent that ought to have carried to his mind unmistakeable conviction of the nature of her sentiments towards him. "Are you safe? Are you hurt?"

But Beppo's mind was, as the Corporal had phrased it, "jealous-mad!" And consequently, neither ear nor eye, nor any other sense, could bring true testimony to it. The virus was still rankling in his heart, and poisoning every sense and all his understanding.

"Ay!" he answered; but not until she had a second time called "Beppo! Beppo!"—"Ay! I am safe from you this time! Your friend must try again, if he means to make profit or credit out of catching me!"

"Beppo! Beppo! You cannot think what you say! You cannot; it is impossible!"

"It *is* wonderful!" he retorted; really feeling as he spoke that it was so. "It *is* very wonderful! And if I had not seen with my own eyes, I could not have believed the depth of baseness to which a worthless woman can fall. I knew you to be bad. I knew you to be false and heartless," he went on at the top of his voice, "when I left you that day of the drawing in the streets of Fano! What did I deserve other than fresh treachery and new falsehood, when I gave a thought to you after what I had seen—seen with my own eyes, and heard with my own ears, in the Palazzo Bollandini? I

deserved it, and I have received it in abundant measure. I knew that you were bad! But I did not think even then, that you could have fallen so low as to make yourself a spy and a lure in the hands of these strangers for the delivering up into their hands of your own countryman and kinsman."

"Beppo! Beppo!" groaned the poor girl in a voice of agony.

But the jealous ear is deaf to the evidence of accent, as to all other.

"Do not suppose," he continued—having now, at least, an opportunity of doing to his heart's content what he had come from his retreat in the Valle di Abisso to do—"Do not suppose, that when I set out to meet you at the ruined tower after the Ave Maria this evening, I did not know of your falseness. My object in coming there was no other than once, before leaving Bella Luce for ever, to let you know my estimation of it, and of you. I knew that you had plotted to cause your lover to be quartered in my father's house. I knew that you were living under the same dishonoured roof with him! But I did *not* imagine that you were scheming to betray me into his hands! I do

think and hope that another Romagnole woman could not be found who would do the like."

"Beppo, your words are killing me. They are stabbing my heart like sharp swords!" she said.

"Those who can do such things are not of the sort to be much hurt, worse luck! by the telling of them. Are not my words true?"

"They are false, Beppo; false from the beginning to the end; as false as you say I am! But I know," she added, after a moment's pause, "that you believe them to be true; and it is that which is killing me!—killing me! for I cannot bear it. I could bear all else, if you believed me true!"

"True! You true! It makes me sick to hear such horrible hypocrisy. What have I said of you that you have not fully deserved? What have I said that was not strictly true?" he asked, with the lurking irrepressible longing that even yet, in some incomprehensible manner, she might be able to show that all the past was only a hideous and distorted dream. For short of this, he could imagine no means of getting rid of the damning facts.

"What have you said of me that was not strictly true, Beppo?" she repeated. "All, all,

all you have said has been utterly false! It is false that I have been false to you! It is false that the Corporal is my lover! It is false that I had anything to do with bringing him to Bella Luce! I bring him to Bella Luce! The Holy Virgin help me! How could I cause him to be sent there? It is false, falsest and most cruel of all, to say that I thought to betray you into his hands! It is all false; and it is very, very, very cruel!"

"Not true that you have been false to me? Doubtless you have forgotten all that passed between you and me the night before you left Bella Luce to go to the cursed, cursed city, under the half-way tree in the path to Santa Lucia; of course, you have forgotten it?"

"Forgotten it! Great Heaven! Oh, Beppo, Beppo! Do men forget such things? Believe me we others never forget them; no, not if we ever so much laboured and longed to do so—let alone when—when—when they are—" here her voice was interrupted and broken by sobbing,—"when they are all—all in the world—"

"I can't hear what you say! Do speak up, if you want me to hear you—not that it much matters," bawled Beppo, from the other side of

the river ; for it seemed very specially important to him not to lose a single word of that particular part of her discourse ; and just at the most interesting point of it, her sobs interfered to make her utterance indistinct.

It was hard upon her to have to bawl the poor little hesitating confession of her beating heart at the top of her voice. However, she was happily a stout healthy-nerved *contadina*, and not trained to a just appreciation of the proprieties of delicate situations. So she resumed aloud :—

“I was saying, Beppo, that people don’t easily forget the only happy moment they have in their lives to remember.”

But as soon as the sentence thus succinctly and clearly enunciated stood out before her in high relief against the surrounding silence, she was startled at the distinctness of the import of it ; and a bright blush, wasting its sweetness on the solitude,—for no eye was near enough to see it,—spread over her face. Ought she to have admitted that ? Well ! let the admission stand ; it was true ; she was miserable now, and reckless in her misery. She would rather—ah ! how much rather—that Beppo should at least take away with

him the belief that she had at all events once loved him. Let the admission stand. Let Beppo know, if he would so far believe her, that the moment when she had received the declaration of his love, and had permitted him to do that which she had declared no man whom she did not love should ever do, was the only really happy one she had ever known. She had said it. It was the truth. Let it stand.

But Beppo was too deeply incensed, had too long a bill of transgressions and damning proofs against her stored up in his mind, to allow himself to be mollified by such a confession, although despite his utmost endeavours to keep up his righteous indignation at a white heat, and to steel his heart against her, the admission he had heard was inexpressibly precious to him.

“ Ah, Giulia, Giulia! such remembrances are neither for you nor for me. You have no right to them. If you have *not* forgotten, it were better for you if you had. If all you then said was false, great God! was there ever woman so false before? If it was true, was there ever woman so light and fickle? If people do not forget the happy moments of their lives, neither can they forget those that have been the most miserable. Oh, Giulia!

can I ever forget, do you think, what I saw in that infamous Palazzo Bollandini? Do you think that that is not stamped upon my heart for ever?"

"What did you see in the Palazzo Bollandini?" asked Giulia, in some slight degree encouraged to hope that possibly all might not yet be lost, by a scarcely perceptible change in Beppo's manner.

"What did I see? Oh, Giulia! can you ask me? Can you wish me to repeat what it withered my heart to look on? Did I not see enough to show me that that man was your accepted lover? What was your conduct to me? And what was your manner to him? Would not any stranger have seen, without any room for doubt, which was the acceptable, and which was the unacceptable to you of the two?"

"It is not true, it never was true, or likely to be true, that Corporal Tenda was my accepted lover. If a stranger had supposed so, you ought never to have supposed so, Beppo. But neither were you my accepted lover!" (It did occur to Beppo, for an instant, that he detected the shade of an emphasis upon the verb in the past tense, *were*; but he resolutely scouted the

idea from his mind.) "And it was very difficult for me," she continued, "to know how to behave ; I tried to do right, God help me if I did not. Corporal Tenda was only an acquaintance. I had no choice but to make acquaintance with him. I did not seek him !"

"Do you mean to assert, that he did not make love to you ?" asked Beppo, fiercely.

"It was not my fault if he did ! I could not help it ! I gave him no encouragement ! He knows, and he will say that I did not ! He will say so, for he is an honourable man."

"You admit, then, that he did make love to you ?" blazed out Beppo.

"He asked me to be his wife ; and I told him that that could never, never be ! I should not say so," she added, feeling that some justification for making such a revelation was needed, "if I was not sure that he would be ready to say the same !"

"Asked you to marry him ! How could he ask you to marry him, and he a Corporal in the army ? A pretty marriage ! You must know very well that a soldier on service is not allowed to marry."

"He wanted me to promise to marry him

when he leaves the army. He is to inherit a farm of his own before long; and then he will leave the service!"

"You seem to know all his affairs."

"How could I help knowing what he told me? Most girls," she could not refrain from adding, "would have thought it a great offer to a poor girl like me; but I—could not—marry him!"

"When did you refuse him? Was it at Fano, pray, or at home, at Bella Luce?"

"At Fano, Beppo!"

"Then what brought him up to Bella Luce?" asked Beppo quickly, in the tone of a man who thinks that he has caught his adversary in a manifest falsehood.

"How should I know, Beppo? What could I have to do with it? Of course, he could not come without being ordered by his officers. What could he have to do with it himself?"

"Shall I tell you what he had to do with it?" said Beppo, who, despite all his fury, began to feel that Giulia was getting the best of the argument, and at the same time, that it would be like pouring new life into him to find that he had not a word to say in justification of his suspicions. "Shall I tell you," he continued,

devoutly hoping that he might be utterly confuted, "what he had to do with it? Soldiers are to be sent to the houses of those who have escaped from the conscription into the hills. Send me, says he to his officers, to Bella Luce. I think I know a way of finding out Beppo Vanni's hiding-place! There's one there that will manage that for me! And perhaps, if I bring him in, the Colonel will recommend me, says he, for a permission to take a wife! Do you think I did not see it all?"

"But he did not want me to marry him till he was out of the army, Beppo!" said Giulia simply; "and besides, I told you that I had already refused him before I left Fano!"

"Oh, yes! men do not always take a girl's 'no' for a 'no' for good and all. Is it likely that it was mere chance that brought him of all the men at Fano to my father's house? Do you suppose I can believe that?"

"I don't know, Beppo! I only know that I had nothing to do with bringing him there; and that I was very, very sorry to see him come, and never was more surprised in my life! And I don't believe that he had anything to do with his being sent, or that he wanted to come."

"Oh, that is very likely, when you own that he was in love with you, and wanted you to marry him !"

"But I had refused him, Beppo, before ; and all the time he has been there, he has hardly ever spoken to me ; and then it was about you."

"Ay ! about the way to hunt me out !"

"No, Beppo. But about the way to persuade you to give yourself up ;—not for his sake, but for your own !"

"Oh ! of course ; all for my sake !"

"Why, he could get no good by your giving yourself up at Fano ! You need not give yourself up to him," urged Giulia.

"He seemed rather anxious that I should give myself up to him, just now, though," retorted Beppo, bitterly.

"Of course, it is his duty to take you if he can. And if he can, he will. But you can put yourself out of his power by giving yourself up at Fano !"

"You seem very desirous that I should give myself up, Giulia, and be sent out of the country ! All for my own good, of course, too, like your friend, the Corporal !"

"It *is* for your own good, Beppo. I was grieved enough when you drew the bad number. God knows whether it was a grief to me! But I know that going out of the country to serve for a few years as a soldier, is better than going out into the mountain to live as a bandit for all your life!"

"But who ever thought of living as a bandit all my life? Ah, Giulia! if I only could have hoped for your love, all the rest would have mattered little—and without it all the rest matters little! I should have come back to Bella Luce as soon as the look-out for the men was over, and the soldiers gone, and all might have been well!"

"You could never have come back, Beppo."

"It was the priest himself who told me so," rejoined Beppo; "they may spread reports to frighten the men, but do you think the priest don't know what he is talking about?"

"I believe," answered Giulia, speaking as if she were saying what she hardly dared to utter, "that the priest knew a great deal better than he said, and that all he cared about was to prevent the men from going to the army. You think he cared about you and Signor Paolo? But what did

he send off Niccoló Bossi into the hills for? Do you think he cared about him?"

"Anyway," rejoined Beppo, rather startled at the force of this argument, "what should you know about the truth of the matter, Giulia?"

"I know from more than one down in the city, who would not say one thing for another. But specially there is Signor Sandro, the lawyer. He knows all about it, and will tell you if you ask him. Why, what do you think he said to Signor Paolo when he knew that you had gone off to the hills? He told him, that of course there could be no thought any more of anything between you and *la Signora Lisa*; that she could never marry a man who had made a bandit of himself."

"Did he say that? How do you know it?" asked Beppo, with more of natural interest in his manner than he had shown before.

"I know it; because, when he came back from Fano in such a temper as I never knew him in before, he told *la padrona*, and *la padrona* let it out to me the next morning."

"So, all that is over. Well, there is some good got out of taking to the hills anyway," said Beppo, with a degree of approach to his natural

manner, which Giulia hailed as a most blessed symptom of future possibilities. She made no reply, however, and after a pause, he resumed, not in the bitterly indignant tone in which he had spoken at the beginning of the conversation, but still sombrely :—

“But even if I were to take all that you have been telling me for gospel ; even if, despite what I saw in Fano, and what I heard at home, I were to believe it all, what is to be said about your decoying me here, and then bringing the soldiers to take me ? You write me a letter. I send you one to tell you that I will come to a certain place, hoping to see there one person alone, and you meet me on the road bringing two soldiers with you. Ah, Giulia ! what can be said to this ?”

“Only the truth, Beppo ; and I will tell you the truth. As the Holy Virgin and the Saints hear me, I will tell you nothing but the truth. And I am sure that the Corporal, ay, and his men too, will tell you the same. When I came to know the truth about the consequences of going away to the hills, and being sure that you looked upon it as a very different matter from what it really was, I determined to try all I possibly could to

persuade you to come back. But the first thing was to find out where you were ; and I went up one day to be with *la Nunziata* at the *Cura*, and there, by good fortune, I saw a man who was a stranger come to speak to the *Curato* ; and the Holy Virgin put it into my head that he was come from you. So when he went away from the *Cura* I slipped out after him, and I came up with him just behind the ruined tower at the other end of the churchyard ; and I said, ‘ Young man, you have come from Beppo Vanni ? ’ Just so. And he was taken aback like, and said, Yes, he was. And then I persuaded him to tell me the name of the place where you were, and to take a letter to you for me. You had my letter, Beppo ? ”

“ Yes ; I had the letter,” said Beppo, beginning, with an infinite sense of relief, to believe that he had been guilty of very monstrous injustice.

“ And I agreed that he should bring back a letter if you would give him one, and put it in a certain hole in the wall of the tower. But it was very difficult for me to know how to go to get the letter without being seen. And I got leave from the *padrona* to spend a day with *Nunziata* at the *Cura* on purpose to find an opportunity. But

two of the soldiers came up to the church that day, and stayed all the day in the churchyard watching, so that I could not get an opportunity to go to the tower without being seen."

"Was the Corporal one of the two men, Giulia, who followed you up to the *Cura*?" asked Beppo.

"No, Beppo; they were two of the soldiers. If it had been the Corporal, I should have told you that it was he. So I found that there was no chance of getting the letter except in the night; and I stayed up, after all the others were gone to bed, and stole out of the house as quietly as I could, and ran all the way up to the churchyard, and got to the tower and found the hole in the bricks, and got the letter, and I was so glad. And the moonlight was very strong, so I was able to read the letter directly; and just when I had read it, I looked up, and was going to run home as fast as I could, when I saw two of the soldiers who had heard me go out of the door, and had got up and followed me up the hill on purpose to see whether I was not going to get a letter from you somewhere or other. And they had been quite close to me all the time without my knowing it, and had heard the letter, and so they knew that you were to come to the tower on

Sunday evening ; and they said they must report it to the Corporal, and that they should catch you when you came. And then I was in despair, and was all that night and all the next day thinking how I could prevent you from falling into the trap. And I thought that the only possible way was to go and meet you on the road, and warn you myself. So I started when they were all in bed, and I did not know where Santa Maria della Valle di Abisso was ; but the man who came to the *Cura* said that he came from Piobico, and I knew that this was the road to Piobico. So I determined to walk all night till I met you, that I might warn you to go back. But the soldiers were watching all the time in the tower, and saw me go by, and followed me all the way all through the night, and when I met you they were close behind. And that is the whole truth, Beppo, as the Holy Virgin sees my heart."

The simplicity and evident candour with which Giulia had told her long story carried conviction with it at last to Beppo's mind. He felt that he had much for which to obtain pardon ;—a very long arrear of gratitude to pay. Nevertheless, the truths that were being brought home to his mind carried with them so exquisite a delight

that he could not forbear from availing himself of the communicative mood in which Giulia appeared to be, to obtain some further pleasures of the same kind.

"And is it really true that you absolutely and altogether refused the Corporal's offer, Giulia?" said he, speaking as if he was really seeking for further information.

"Absolutely and altogether!" exclaimed Giulia. "Of course it was absolutely and altogether. Oh, Beppo, don't you know that I could not marry him?"

"It is true," said he, hypocritically, "that I have been told that he is one of the worst characters in the service!"

"Oh, who can have said so great a falsehood?" said Giulia, very energetically. "I assure you, Beppo, that he bears a very good character, and is much thought of by his officers."

"It was the priest who said that he was notoriously one of the worst men in the army," replied Beppo; "he told Babbo so, at the same time that he told us, Giulia, that you had made yourself talked of all over Fano by flirting with him!"

"Oh, Beppo! Is it possible that the priest said

that? Is it possible? Indeed, indeed, Beppo, it is very untrue! And I do think that the *Curato* cannot be a good man. Corporal Tenda is well known to be a very respectable man!"

"Why did you refuse him, then, Giulia?" said Beppo, reaching at last the point he had been driving at ever since he had brought the conversation back to the subject of the Corporal.

"Beppo, Beppo! *can* you still ask me why I refused him, or any other man in the world? Do you not know? Is it not for me rather to say that *you* have forgotten?"

"No, Giulia, I have not forgotten! I have forgotten nothing. I could repeat to you every word that you said to me, and every word that I said to you under the great half-way tree—every word! Would you let me repeat them to you now, Giulia? Can you forgive me?"

"Beppo! Oh, Beppo, Beppo! forgive you! Say it all again, repeat all that you said that night, and see if I can forgive you!"

"But it is so far off, Giulia, across the river! I wish I could come over to that side!" said Beppo, with a strong feeling that the conversation in question could not be advantageously

rehearsed with a river rushing between the parties to the dialogue.

"And how ever are you to come over to this side?" cried Giulia, recalled for the first time to the immediate practical difficulties of the situation; "how can you come here, or how can I come to you?"

"*Per Bacco!*" exclaimed Beppo, looking around him; "I don't very well see how I am to get out of this place without help. It is quite impossible to get back the way I came here! It is out of the question to climb the rocks on this side. It is not far down the stream to a place where I could get up the bank on that side;—just below the end of the tunnel. But the river is running at a terrible pace! With a rope to help me I could do it well enough! But——"

"Halloa!" interrupted a new comer on the scene, appearing behind Giulia, at the break in the wall on the top of the precipice; "you don't see how to get out of that, you say? But I don't understand how the devil you got there!"



CHAPTER V.

SIGNOR STEFANO PRINATI, OF CAGLI.

CIULIA on hearing these words uttered behind her, turned round with a great start, but was immediately reassured by perceiving at a glance that the new comer was of her own class and country,—a *contadino* of the Romagna. He was a jolly-looking middle-aged man, with a broad white hat, and a broad red face, and a broad buff-cloth waistcoat; evidently a well-to-do farmer, or perhaps even a small proprietor of the hill-country.

“In the first place,” said the stranger, “let us ask the young woman whether she wishes you to get away from where you are. For there’s two different cases, you will observe, when a gentleman and lady are on different sides of a river. There is one case when they are both agreed to

wish themselves on the same side ; and there is another case when one of the two is devilish glad to have the river between them ; and *per Bacco!* there's a third case," continued the speaker, striking his hands violently together as he spoke, and looking hard at Giulia, "there's the case in which both parties are well pleased to remain on different sides of the stream. To think of my forgetting that now. To be sure," he continued, argumentatively, "our friend on the other side was manifesting a desire to get out of his present position, but it might be with the intention that you should change to his side, signorina ! Never take anything for granted, you know. I never do. Do you, signorina ?"

"No, sir !" said Giulia, hesitating and gazing at him, only because he had just told her not to do so.

"Yes, you do ! You have taken it for granted that I am a farmer ; but I am not. See the consequence of taking things for granted. I am a lawyer, Stefano Prinati, of Cagli, signorina——"

"Why, you are taking things for granted, Signor Prinati, yourself !" said Giulia, with a laugh that indicated how very considerably matters were

changed with her, and what a very different aspect the entire sublunary world wore to her eyes from what it did half an hour ago.

"The deuce I am! And, pray, what am I taking for granted, and what do you know about the matter?" said Signor Stefano Prinati, with an amount of surprise and interest that seemed altogether to take his attention off the state of things that had at first arrested it.

"Why, you never saw me before," said Giulia, "and you call me signorina! How can you tell, pray, that I am not *sposa*?"

"*Per Dio!* it's true!" said the lawyer, looking at her with an expression of the utmost contrition, and dropping his head on his bosom. "I've been and done it again. Signora, I will confess the truth. I have been taking things for granted all my life, and living in a perpetual condition of wrong-boxedness, if I may use the expression, in consequence. And when I said I never took things for granted, it was the enunciation of a future resolution rather than of a past fact. But, alas! I've been and done it again!"

The man's repentance for this relapse appeared to be so sincerely genuine, that gentle Giulia felt

quite sorry for her little joke. "But, Signor Prinati," she said, consolingly, "at all events this time you were not wrong, as I was in taking you for a farmer! I am no *sposa*!"

"Still I had no business to take it for granted," said the lawyer, ruefully. "But to return to the previous question,—Do you, signorina, desire that the gentleman on the other side of the river should get across to this side?"

"Certainly that is my wish," said Giulia.

"For better or worse?—which means in the present circumstances and context, whether with dry skin or wet through?"

"Certainly if he cannot get over dry, he must come through the water!" returned Giulia.

"And you, friend, on the other side. Are you only on the other side of the river, or on the other side of the question also?"

"Of course I want to get out of this, if that is what you mean," said Beppo, who did not seem to enter into the stranger's humour so readily as Giulia.

"You are quite right, my friend, in not taking it for granted that that is what I mean. That, however, is my meaning. The next question is,—How do you mean to set about it?"

"Upon my word I don't see how to get away from this bit of bank without help,—not with the river as it is now!" said Beppo.

"And how can one give you any help? What sort of help do you want?" said the farmer-like lawyer.

"Well, if anybody could throw me a rope from the lower end of the tunnel, and make the other end of it fast to the rail by the roadside, I could manage it then!"

"If a rope would serve the turn, as it happens, I can help you to what you want; for I am carrying home a new rope for my well from Fossombrone in my *calessino*."

"Where is the *calessino*, signor?" said Giulia, eagerly.

"Here at the end of the tunnel. I was coming through, and hearing voices up here among the ruins, as I got to the mouth of it, I thought I would see what on earth anybody could be talking at the top of their voice up here about! If I go for the rope, Signor Beppo,—(I am not taking for granted, observe, that your name is Beppo; for I heard the signorina call you so),—if I get the rope and help you over to this side, will you promise to tell me how, in the name of all the

saltimbanchi in Christendom, you got where you are? Is it a bargain?"

"Yes, signor, it is a bargain. You get a rope across to me, and I will tell you and show you how I got here. But I won't promise to do it again, mind."

So Signor Prinati went to his *calessino*, which he had left standing in the road,—taking it for granted that the little Marchesan pony would stand quiet while he satisfied his curiosity as to the talking he had heard going on among the ruins,—and got out of the little box under the seat a coil of bran-new rope, and proceeded with it, accompanied by Giulia, to the lower end of the tunnel. At that point the rocks on the opposite side of the river are as high and as precipitous as in the upper part of the pass; but on the side of the road just where it comes out at the lower end of the tunnel, there is only a high grassy bank, very steep indeed, but not so much so as to be impassable.

At this point there are some strong white timber posts and rails along the edge of the road, to which Beppo intended that the end of the rope should be fastened. Giulia and the lawyer stooped and passed under these, and scrambled

down the turfy bank to the edge of the stream, where, when they had come as close as they could to the place where the bank ended and the precipitous rock began, they were about fifty feet lower down the stream than Beppo on the other side.

The lawyer was about to cast the rope, but Beppo called out to him—

“If you will take my advice, signor, you will fasten the end of the rope to the road-posts before casting it. Then, if you fail to throw it so that I can catch it, the rope will be safe; otherwise we might chance to lose it altogether.”

“Right, friend; I was taking it for granted again, that I could throw you one end without fail!”

So Signor Stefano climbed the bank again, fastened the rope, and then once more came down to the edge of the water to attempt the feat of throwing the other end of it to Beppo, while Giulia stood looking on. The exertion of throwing it had to be made somewhat at a disadvantage, for the spot on which the lawyer had to stand while he did it, was not of the surest standing ground in the world. Gathering the rope into a coil, he flung it overhanded with all

his force, and pitched it into the water little more than half way towards the spot on the opposite bank, which was the nearest that Beppo could get to in order to reach it.

"There would have been the loss of a good rope, if it had not been for your thought of fastening it first, Signor Beppo!" said the lawyer, proceeding to draw it up out of the river. "But if I don't do much better than that, it seems to be likely that you will stay where you are for the present!"

"Try again, signor; perhaps the rope was stiff," said Giulia.

"Oh, yes! I am going to try again. But I am very much afraid I am not going to do it. It's a trick rather out of my line, you see."

The second attempt succeeded no better than the first; and again the rope had to be drawn up out of the water.

"Let me try, signor!" said Giulia. "I don't take it for granted that I can do it, but I can but try!"

"What you'll most likely do will be to fall into the water yourself!" said the lawyer.

"Take care, Giulia! that might end the job the worst way of all," cried Beppo. "Oh, signor!

you take a good hold of her gown behind while she throws."

"Ay, that will be the plan; and you may take it for granted, this once, that I won't let her go! Now for it."

Giulia took the coil of rope, not overhanded as Signor Stefano had done, but underhanded; and carefully leaving a sufficient length to reach Beppo slack and uncoiled, and first swinging the coil in her hand backwards and forwards three or four times, launched it towards Beppo with so true an aim that the coiled part of the rope fell around his head and shoulders. But the force she had used in throwing it made her foot slip; and if the lawyer had not been as good as his word, and held on firmly to her dress, she must have slipped into the stream; as it was, she recovered her footing in an instant.

"*Bravo*, Signora Giulia! for I perceive that to be your name from what your friend said just now. *Bravo, davvero!*"

"Thanks, Giulia! you see it is written, that it is you who are to be the saving of me!" cried Beppo.

"No, it is still you who must do that!" said

Giulia; "I can but at best put into your hands the means of doing it!"

Beppo understood her perfectly well; but of course the surface meaning only of her words was intelligible to Signor Stefano.

"She speaks as well as she throws, Signor Beppo," said he. "You have got the rope you asked for,—quite enough to hang yourself with; but I confess I do not quite see what other use you are going to put it to."

"I shall manage my part, signor, never fear!" returned Beppo. "Now, if you will kindly draw up all the rope except what I keep here, and fix it well round the posts, so that I may have a tight pull upon it, I think I can get across. With the help of the rope and a good jump I think I can clear more than half the distance, and as soon as ever I fall into the water, you must haul up the rope as fast as you can and pull me out."

"You'll be sure to keep fast hold of your end," said the lawyer.

"That you *may* take for granted!" said Beppo; "I don't want to be drowned *now*," he added, after a little pause, in a significative manner, that was intended only for Giulia's ears—or at least only for her understanding.

The preparations were made as he directed ; Giulia and the lawyer planted themselves one on each side of the rope ready to haul in as soon as ever Beppo should have made his plunge.

“Now then,” cried he, twining the end of the rope firmly round his horny brown hands, “here goes !”

He sprung, giving a strong pull on the rope at the same moment, and in the next plunged into the eddying river, having cleared a good two-thirds of the distance between him and his friends on the other side.

They lost not a second in pulling away with a will, and in less than a minute landed him on the bank, dripping like a Newfoundland dog fresh from a swim, but no otherwise the worse for his adventure.

“Oh, Beppo ! keep off ! don’t shake yourself near me !” cried Giulia as he scrambled breathless up the bank to the road.

“And now then, you have to tell me how you got on to that bit of bank !” cried Signor Stefano.

But to make his promised information intelligible, it was necessary to return to the ruins on the ledge of rock on the outside of the tunnel. And to do this,—inasmuch as they were now

standing in the road at the lower end of the tunnel, and the ledge of rock was only accessible from the road at the upper end of it, as has been previously explained,—it was necessary to pass through that dark passage. And although Beppo had carefully complied with Giulia's request that he would "keep off," and not "shake himself over her," up to the time when they all three entered it together, yet when they emerged into the sunshine, at the other end, Giulia's dress was so much wetted all down one side, that Signor Stefano could not help saying as he looked at her,

"Why! I declare, he has been shaking himself over you, signora! You look wet through!"

Giulia laughed and blushed; but she only said, "Now you are taking things for granted again, Signor Stefano!"

"If you want to know how I got across the river, Signor Stefano, you must come up to the place in the broken wall where you first found *la Signorina Giulia*! There," he continued, when they had reached the spot; "do you see that old stump of a tree down there, on the jutting part of the rock, exactly underneath us? Well! I jumped from here right down on to that; and when I got

there, finding that it was not a good place for a permanent residence, I concluded to take another jump right into the bushes on the other side there! That was the way I got there."

"Well! but what, in the name of all the Saints in Paradise, made you dream of taking such a jump?" said Signor Stefano, staring at him.

"Ah!" said Beppo, looking at him with the genuine *contadino* shrewdness (more common, however, among the Tuscan than among the Romagnole peasantry)—"that is another matter! That did not enter into our contract! And your worship may take anything you please for granted on that subject."

"No! I suppose it was to escape from the signorina here; but I won't take it for granted. And I won't ask any questions. I never do; specially when there is reason to think that it may be unpleasant to answer them. But it might possibly be," continued the lawyer, looking hard at him, "that you might take an interest in a paper I have got in my pocket here; merely a matter of public news, you know; but you might like to hear it."

Giulia and Beppo looked at each other; and Giulia's breath began to come rather short, as

Signor Stefano pulled out a huge pocket-book, and took from it a paper printed in large letters on one side only ;—evidently one of the proclamations prepared for sticking up on the walls and public places, in the manner the Italian government uses as a means of communicating with its subjects.

“ I got this at Fossombrone this morning. A score or so of them had been brought up from Fano in the night. They were only out yesterday evening! ”

And then he proceeded to read a statement addressed to all those who had been led away by evil advice and persuasion to leave their homes, in order to avoid the conscription. It was recited, that it being the special wish of “ Vittore Emmanuele, by the Grace of God, and by the National Will, King of Italy,” to treat his new subjects of Romagna and the Marches with the utmost possible clemency and indulgence, and it being perfectly well known to the government that in the great majority of cases the deserters had been led into disobedience to the laws by those who ought to have been the first to urge on them the duty of obeying them, therefore it was the pleasure of his aforesaid Majesty, on the

occasion of his coming into that part of his dominions for the first time, to offer a free pardon to all such deserters as should give themselves up to the military authorities on or before a day named.

"Oh, Beppo, can you hesitate now?" exclaimed Giulia, speaking aside to him, as the lawyer was putting back the proclamation into his pocket-book.

"I told you just now, Giulia, that it was written that you were to be the saving of me, if I am to be saved!" he answered in the same tone. "Giulia, if you will say that you love me, and will be mine when I come back from serving my time, I will give myself up to-morrow. If not, I go back to the hills! If it is to be 'yes,' cry *Viva l'Italia!*"

"*Viva l'Italia!*" cried Giulia aloud, without any hesitation; but with a shake in her voice, and a tear in her eye, as she stole her hand timidly out from her side to seek for his.

"*Viva l'Italia!*" shouted Beppo in reply, in a voice that made the vault of the tunnel, at the mouth of which they were standing, ring again.

"Eh! well! yes, with all my heart, *Viva l'Italia!*" said Signor Stefano. "A very good end

to the proclamation. There it is at the bottom, but I did not read it, because that is a matter of course!"

"Ah! you took it for granted, Signor Stefano. I did not!" said Beppo, speaking to one of his companions, but meaning his words for the other. "I do not mind owning to you, Signor Stefano," he continued, "though you are kind enough to abstain, as you say, from asking questions, that the proclamation you have shown us has a special interest for me. I have been out to escape a bad number drawn at Fano the other day. But that proclamation has decided me to surrender myself;—that, and one or two other things!" he added, with a look at Giulia.

"I am very glad to have helped to bring you to that decision, signor! very glad! What! turn bandit and outlaw, to avoid serving a few years! It is madness! A respectable-looking young fellow like you, too, to think of throwing your life away in that way!"

"You see, Beppo, this gentleman says just the same as Signor Sandro said at Fano!"

"What, Signor Sandro at Fano?" asked the Cagli lawyer,—“not my good friend, Sandro Bartoldi?"

"Yes! Signor Sandro Bartoldi, the lawyer at Fano," said Beppo. "Is he a friend of yours?"

"*Altro!* I was dining with him the day before yesterday; and he was talking a great deal about the men who have left their homes, and taken to the hills! It is a very bad job! A great many families ruined! He was telling me of one case—and upon my life, now I look at you, I should not wonder—upon my life!—but I won't take it for granted. Did you ever happen, signor, to hear of such a man as Beppo Vanni, of Bella Luce, at Santa Lucia?"

"Why, that's the man you helped to pull out of the water at the Furlo pass!" said Beppo.

"Well, now, that's an odd chance. Old Sandro Bartoldi was talking a deal about you, I can tell you! I am right glad, I assure you, Signor Vanni, in having contributed to your resolution to put yourself at one with the law. And this I presume, then, is the Signorina Giulia Vanni! I have heard of her too, from my friend Lisa Bartoldi."

"Yes, signor! this is my cousin, Giulia Vanni," replied Beppo, rather in the tone of one who means to add,—“and I should like to hear what any one has to say against *that!*”

"Ah—h—h—h! Yes! yes! yes! yes! I see, I see, I see! There are one or two things then that I positively must take for granted, this once, just for the last time! And now, signora, that you have found the gentleman, and induced him to cry, '*Viva l'Italia!*' after you, how do you mean to take your prisoner home?"

"Really, to tell you the truth, I am very much at a loss how to take him home, Signor Stefano! For the fact is, that I walked all the way from Bella Luce here in the course of last night; and I hardly know how I shall get back again! One thing, however, is very certain, and you really may take it safely for granted, that now I have at last succeeded in apprehending him, I do not mean to let him go again."

And a commentary on this speech, too, was supplied by Giulia's eyes, for the special and exclusive benefit of her cousin Beppo.

"I see what it will have to be!" said Signor Stefano. "I shall have to lend you the *calessino* to go back to Bella Luce. That will be the best plan; and I can do no less for my friend Sandro's sake! It will be your best way too. You had better go to Bella Luce to-day, and go into town and give yourself up to-morrow."

"I shall stay very little time at home," said Beppo, bethinking himself that he would much rather, if possible, avoid meeting the priest. "If you are kind enough, Signor Stefano, to do as you say, we shall reach Bella Luce to-night; and I would be off to Fano the first thing in the morning."

Beppo was forgetting that this departure would be settled for him, without his having any voice in the matter, as soon as he should be in the hands of the Corporal's party at Bella Luce. But in the upshot it came to the same thing.

"Well, I'll tell you how it must be," said Signor Stefano. "You shall come on with me as far as Acqualagna. I shall be able to get a conveyance of some sort there, to take me to Cagli, without any difficulty. The pony shall have a feed; and then you shall start!"

"I do not know how to thank you for so much kindness, signor. I am afraid, too, that you will have to wait for any manifestation of my gratitude till I return from serving my time, if such a day shall ever arrive," said Beppo, rather ruefully.

"To be sure it will arrive, Signor Beppo; and I shall come and see you at Bella Luce. And in that case, I suppose I need not say farewell to

la Signora Giulia here, for ever! May I take that for granted, eh? Meantime, tell Sandro Bartoldi how I pulled you out of the river at the Passo di Furlo, and sent you in to give yourself up in the custody of your captor."

"*Addio, Signor Stefano! e tante grazie!*" said Beppo.

"*Ma grazie davvero, Signore!*" re-echoed Giulia; "for I don't know how I should ever have got home myself, let alone taking home my prisoner!" she added.

"*Addio, cari miei, e a rivederci!*" said the worthy lawyer. And so Giulia took home her Conscript.



CHAPTER VI.

WHY DIDN'T SHE MARRY THE CORPORAL ?

THE journey from Acqualagna home to Bella Luce was a pleasanter one for Giulia than her last return had been, sitting by the side of old farmer Paolo, as she came back from Fano. There are sundry things in the world which depend altogether for their pleasantness or the reverse on the companions in conjunction with whom they may be performed or undergone. But a journey stands pre-eminent in this respect ! And of all journeys, a journey in a *calessino*,—which is but a somewhat prettier and more classical name for a gig of a rather less comfortable and more picturesque form than the English respectability-vouching conveyance,—a journey in a *calessino* is the most striking manifestation of the truth of the proposition.

There is no escape, no mitigation, no turning your back upon a man, no giving him the cold shoulder even, in the case. You may keep your distance in your corner, and maintain a dignified system of non-intercourse in a post-chaise. But in a gig it is not possible to do so.

It had been dreadful to sit by the side of that snarling and sneering old man, to be the helpless butt of his ill-humour, and the compulsory sharer in every jolt, and victim of every jibe. Now the road back to Bella Luce seemed a very short one, though, in fact, it was somewhat longer than that which Giulia had traversed the previous night. For the way down from the village into the valley of the Metauro, passing by the old tower at the back of the churchyard, and thence plunging into the woods that for the most part cover the labyrinth of little valleys that lie between it and the main artery valley of the above-named river, is in many parts of it a mere bridle-path, impracticable even for such light vehicles as that lent by the lawyer of Cagli to Beppo and Giulia. They were obliged to pass through Fossombrone, and take a somewhat longer route, which brought them into the village at the foot or lower part of it—at the side of it, that is,

nearer to Bella Luce,—instead of by the back or higher part of it, on the other side of the church, the churchyard, and the *Cura*.

“*Viva l'Italia!* you know, Giulia!” said Beppo, as soon as they were through the darkness of the tunnel on their way homewards. “If you take me prisoner now, you know the terms of the bargain?”

“I have no wish to be off it, Beppo—as you know, signor, quite as well as I can tell you,” answered Giulia.

“I know it! Oh, come now, Giulia! How was I to know it, when it's only within the last hour that I have got you to say a word of comfort to me; and I have been striving for it for the last three years—not to say more or less all your life? Perhaps if I had asked you before, when I was wet through, you would have listened to me. It's true I never tried that way before; but I think it's the only thing I have not tried.”

“You never tried getting into trouble before, Beppo *mio*,” said she; “not that, after all, to be quite honest,” she continued, after a little pause of meditation,—“not that, after all, it was so much your trouble as my own that has made the difference.”

"Made what difference, Giulia?"

"Why, the difference you were speaking of, Beppo; the difference that you were saying must be because you are wet through now, and always had dry clothes on before when you asked me to marry you. But it was that my heart was dry with pride, and now that it has been wetted through and through with tears of sorrow and humility."

"I never thought that you were proud, Giulia," said Beppo, simply.

"Yes I was, Beppo," she said; "I was too proud to bear all that will be said of me on account of this love of ours. I was ready to break my heart in secret rather than let them say that I had schemed to catch a great match. Ah, Beppo! Beppo! if you had been as poor as I, or if I had been the rich one, and you poor as I, do you think I should have behaved as I did? Do you think I was not breaking my heart all the time? And that night when you stopped me under the half-way tree—the night before I was to go to Fano—oh, that night! that night! Could you not guess? could you not see that if your heart was sore to part, mine was sorer? that I was breaking my heart because I was going away

and could not tell you that I loved you, and nobody else in all the wide, wide world, and never should or would or could love anybody else ? Oh, Beppo, could you not feel it ?”

“But why then did you always say quite the contrary ?” remonstrated Beppo.

“I have told you, Beppo—because I was proud ; because I could not bear the sneers and gibes and reproaches of your father and of Carlo, and of everybody ; that they should say I had schemed and laid myself out to catch you, to lure you,—not because I loved you, but because I wanted to be mistress one day of Bella Luce ; and that I had stood in the way of your fortune, and prevented your making a rich marriage—I who was taken into your father’s house for charity. I was too proud to bear all this. And so I was content, rather than bear it, to break my own heart and vex yours. And I know that they will say all this ! I know they will !”

“If I hear a human tongue wag with any such cursed lie ; if I see but an eye look a thought of the kind——” said Beppo, grinding his teeth.

“But you won’t see or hear anything of the sort, Beppo *mio* ! At least I hope not ; and though I shall, I have learned to bear it. That

is what I was saying just now. My proud heart has been wetted through and through with tears of real heart-break and humility. I won't be proud any more, Beppo. You know, Beppo, whether it is you yourself, or your money, or your father's money, that I love ; and that shall be enough for me. I won't mind what anybody else says."

"But, Giulia dearest, you told me, you know, that you had refused the Corporal," said Beppo.

"To be sure I did. *Che!* What was he to me?"

"But didn't you tell me that he was very well off, or going to be, when his uncle dies?"

"Oh, yes ; I know all about it," said Giulia, laughing. "Specially I know that it is all freehold land, and most of it pasture ; for the poor little man told me so over and over again. You see you don't know how to make love, Beppo ! That's where it is. You never told me anything about the money in Signor Paolo's coffers, nor about the goodness of the land at Bella Luce, nor anything of the kind. Corporal Tenda told me all about it. I shall never forget that his land, near Cuneo, is all freehold !"

"And I have got no freehold land, nor anything of the sort," cried Beppo ; "and how can

they say, then, that you wanted me for what I have got, when, if that was what you were after, you might have had so much better ? I should like to have an answer to that !” said Beppo, triumphantly. “ Why did not you marry the Corporal ? That is what I say ! Why didn't she marry the Corporal ? ”

But the only answer Beppo got to this reiterated question interfered with his driving to that degree, that the little Marchesan pony, accustomed as he was to minute guns behind him, discharged at regular intervals by Signor Stefano's whip, had long since, on missing those reminders, subsided into a very pleasantly sauntering walk. For Italian drivers do not take the same precaution for keeping their whip arm free that English coachmen do. They sit not on the right hand of a person sitting on the same seat with them, but on the left. And in this position, you see, when the space is small,—and Signor Stefano's *calessino* was a very little one—and when into the bargain your fare lays her head down on your shoulder, it very much interferes with that vigorous cracking of your whip which Italian coachmanship requires, and may be said to constitute a real case of driving under difficult circumstances. Finding his whip

arm thus disabled, Beppo had given up that part of the business as a bad job altogether ; and putting the whip out of his hand entirely, resting it on the seat beside his knee, with its butt end down by the side of his foot in the bottom of the little carriage, he had that arm free for any other purpose which the emergencies of the case might seem to require. And really there was another purpose, besides cracking the whip, that did seem to require some attention from the arm so placed at liberty. It must be understood that the little light *calessini* of this part of the Apennine are constructed without any back to them at all. The seat is a comfortably wide, but entirely open and backless cushion, suspended between upright supporters at the two extremities. So that a person sitting thereon has nothing at his back at all ; and if, under such circumstances, your fare *will* lay down her head upon your shoulder, it really does seem as if there were only one disposition of your right arm in any degree open to your choice.

Notwithstanding all these disadvantageous circumstances, the pony had made a quiet little shambling trot of it as long as the road was down hill,—which it is most part of the way from the tunnel of the Furlo pass to Fossombrone. But

before coming to that little town on the Metauro, there is a rather considerable ascent to the huge one-arched bridge by which that river is spanned, a little before the town is entered. And there the pony, unreminded of his duties by any manifestations from behind him, diminished his little trot to a lazy, zigzagging walk up the hill, just as Beppo was triumphantly pushing the point of his argument.

"Why didn't she marry the Corporal? That is what I say! Why didn't she marry the Corporal?" said Beppo, raising his voice in the warmth of his eloquence, but not enforcing it with any gesticulation incompatible with the occupation of his left hand by the reins, and of his right in the manner the reader wots of.

"Why didn't she marry the Corporal? That is the question!" urged Beppo.

"Ah! that is just what I wanted to know! But I found it out before you did, Signor Beppo! And, *per Bacco!* I think that anybody who happened to be here present, might find out the answer to the question for themselves!"

The voice proceeded from the side of the road, at a spot which, though the *calessino* was in the act of passing before it, was almost hidden by an

abrupt angle in the parapet wall of the approaches to the bridge. It was a voice perfectly well known to both the travellers in the *calessino* ; and, in fact, proceeded from the very individual in question. The Corporal and his comrade, having marched all night on Giulia's traces from Bella Luce to the Furlo pass, and having then turned unrested to march back again, had not made any great speed, and had availed themselves of a stone bench in the shade, erected against the parapet wall, to rest themselves. So that moderate as the little trot of Signor Stefano's pony had been, and notwithstanding that Beppo and Giulia must have started on their way to Bella Luce nearly two hours after the Corporal, the pony overtook the latter at the bridge of Fossombrone.

At this sudden and most unexpected interposition, Giulia's head was very quickly raised from the shoulder on which it had been reposing ; but the right arm, which should have been holding the whip, was only drawn the tighter around that which it was encircling. At the same time the other hand, whether purposely or not, drew in the rein sufficiently to cause the pony, who was disposed to take the very slightest hint of that kind, to come to a full stop.

"So you have been more fortunate than I was, signora!" continued the Corporal, coming up to the side of the little vehicle; "and have captured your man! You are taking him in to headquarters, I see! That's all right! And it's a capital way, by-the-by, of securing a capture, that way I see you have of fixing his arm around your own body. He can't take it away, anyhow! I see you have been in the water, Signor Beppo! What a devil of a jump that was!"

"Corporal," said Beppo, "I owe you my life! And you owe me the attempt to take away yours! What can I say to you? And how can I look you in the face?"

"Why, by turning round this way you could! But it's difficult, I see, fixed as you are to your captor! Did you try to take my life? Ah, yes; fired at me! So you did! I had forgotten all about it. We don't recollect such things long in our profession. And, besides, you could not have meant to hit me, and miss me twice running, at that distance,—impossible! So we will say no more about that! But what I say is," continued the Corporal, changing his tone, winking at Giulia, and imitating Beppo's manner, "what I say is, why didn't she marry the Corporal? Ah, Signor

Beppo," he continued, again changing his manner, and speaking with earnestness, "why did not you find that out sooner? Why did you ever allow yourself to doubt why she did not marry the Corporal? Should you not have known right well why the Corporal never had the ghost of a chance, from first to last? Ah! all I wish is that I may fall in with,—I won't say such another girl, for there is no hope of that,—but with some one that I can love, and who will love me half as well as your cousin loves you! Why would she not marry the Corporal? Why would she not marry the King, if he asked her? as no doubt he would, if he got the chance! Because there was only one man in all the world that she cared a straw for; and for him she was ready to follow him in sorrow and disgrace to the end of the earth, and to play the Corporal any manner of trick to save him from falling into the Corporal's hands! That's why. And now, friend Beppo, I think it is very likely that she will marry the Corporal, after all!"

Giulia gave a little jump, and Beppo tightened his grasp of her waist, and glared at the man, whose face he had just professed he could not look on!

"Ah, yes! You may look as fierce about it as

you please!" continued he; "depend upon it, she will marry the Corporal, after all—Corporal Beppo Vanni! He'll be the happy man!"

"Ah—h—h!" said Giulia.

Beppo stretched out his left hand, dropping the reins for the purpose, to the Corporal, saying, as he did so,—

"I am slow to understand, Corporal, as you have seen—*pur troppo!* But I'm slow to forget, too; and I shall not forget you in a hurry!"

"And I have got some good news for you," said the Corporal; and then he told them of the proclamation that was just out, of which he had heard as he came along the road. The travellers told him how they had already heard of it from the new acquaintance who had lent them the means of getting back to Bella Luce.

"And now," said the Corporal, "of course you are going to Fano to give yourself up. I presume you will go in to-morrow morning?"

"That is my purpose," said Beppo.

"Because, you know, by rights I ought to arrest you now directly; but if I have your word that you mean to surrender to-morrow morning, why I know I can trust you, and I am content. I shall march in to-morrow morning, and report that I

have been informed that you had gone to surrender yourself. There will be no need for us to go up to Bella Luce ; we can stay and rest ourselves here in Fossombrone, and go into the city in the morning. It would be well for you to be there first. What time can you be in Fano ? ”

“ I’ll be there a couple of hours after daylight,” said Beppo ; “ that is,” he added, “ if your comrades there will let me come ! ”

“ Ay, to be sure ; that is well thought of. I must go up home with you, after all,” said the Corporal. “ Perhaps you can let me manage to stick myself on behind here, somehow ? ”

So Signor Stefano’s pony had an extra load to climb the hill from Fossombrone to Bella Luce ; but before entering the village the Corporal got down, and allowed his companions to go on and make their entry into Santa Lucia, and arrive at Bella Luce without his superintendence.



CHAPTER VII.

CONCLUSION.

SO GIULIA brought home her captive unaided ! The route by which they entered the village did not take them past the door of the *cura*, as has been already explained ; and they hoped, in consequence, that they would escape falling in with the priest. He was, however, just entering the lower end of the village, on his return from Bella Luce, where he had been in consultation with Signor Paolo respecting the disappearance of Giulia from home in the preceding night, and had been pointing out how thoroughly lost and abandoned she was, and how he had always said and thought so, when Beppo and she made their appearance in the village street in their *calassino* ! He and they both caught sight of each other at the same moment ;

and the two fugitives made up their minds to a somewhat stormy quarter of an hour. But the priest judged the occasion to be one of those when discretion is the better part of valour, and suddenly turned into a doorway as they approached him. The reader will not be displeased to hear, however, that this tardy discretion in meddling with Beppo Vanni's affairs was too tardy to save his reverence from the consequences of his share in the events which have been narrated in these pages ; for among the most recent news from the Romagna is that of the conviction and punishment of a number of parish priests for the crime of instigating their parishioners to desertion ; and in the list of these may be found the name of Don Evandro Baluffi,—or, at all events, of one who acted exactly as Don Evandro has been described to have acted.

A rose by any other name, we know, would smell as sweet ; and the conviction of a priest, under any other name, let us hope, will prove as salutary !

Beppo told his father, in the most respectful manner, that he meant to give himself up to the military authorities at Fano on the morrow, and to marry his cousin Giulia as soon as his period of

service should have expired. The old farmer scratched his head, and said he must speak to the priest about it to-morrow.

Eventually, however, the old man was persuaded, mainly by the eloquence of the Corporal, who arrived at Bella Luce on that memorable Sunday night about half-an-hour after Giulia and Beppo, to recede from any active opposition to his son's wishes. It was remarkable what an authority the Corporal became in the old farmer's eyes, as soon as the latter found out that he was heir to a snug little farm, and that it was all freehold land !

Signor Tenda turned out to be a good prophet, too, for Giulia *did* marry the Corporal. Beppo was sent, on joining his regiment, not against the Austrians, but to aid in putting down the brigandage in Naples ; and in that specially dangerous and disagreeable service he was fortunate enough to have an opportunity of distinguishing himself by the capture of a noted chief, who had given great trouble to the administration for a long time, to such good purpose, that he got his stripes at once, together with a year's leave, and permission to marry.

Of course Signor Sandro Bartoldi relented, and

Lisa married Captain Brilli. Of course Giulia went to live with *la Dossi* during Beppo's absence. Of course her marriage has been, in all respects, a happy one.

It is not likely, however, that she will ever live at Bella Luce, as she had wished to do "always;" for, on an arrangement being come to that Beppo should be the heir to old Paolo's savings, and that Carlo should succeed him in the farm, Corporal Beppo declared that he should prefer sticking to the flag, and pushing his fortunes in the army.

THE END.

